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The Most Noble and Royal House of Kotromanić. Constructing Dynastic Identity in Medieval Bosnia

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Members of the Kotromanić family ruled Bosnia from at least the second half of the thirteenth century, perhaps even earlier, until the Ottoman conquest of the Bosnian Kingdom in 1463.[1] During those two centuries of political domination they developed their authority "by divine right" and, apart from a short interruption at the beginning of the 1300s when they were forced to surrender their position to the counts of Bribir for two decades, the supreme position of the dynasty was never seriously challenged. Even though certain kings were deposed from the throne, the alternative ruler was always selected from among the Kotromanići. This allowed Bosnia and its sovereigns to establish a resilient monarchy situated between Latin and Orthodox Christianity, as well as between the Hungarian kings and the Ottoman Sultans, accepting and merging influences from all sides.

The rapid territorial and economic development of the state during the reign of Ban Stjepan II (r. 1322–1353), coupled with the growth of the ruler's personal prestige, required the construction and promotion of a dynastic identity. This was aided by the fact that members of the Kotromanić family were allied through marriage with many distinguished noble and royal houses in the region. Stjepan II himself was a grandson of the Serbian King Dragutin Nemanjić, and he also descended from the illustrious dynasties of the Hungarian Árpáds, Byzantine Komnenos, Angelos, and Laskaris, as well as from the Venetian Dandolos. Furthermore, Ban Stjepan II married off his daughter Elizabeth to the Angevin King Louis the Great of Hungary, which was a testament that his family was almost on equal footing with the most potent European dynasties of the time. Stjepan's dynastic enterprise was further developed and enhanced for the coronation programme of his nephew Ban Tvrtko, who ruled from 1353, and was crowned "king of the Serbs and Bosnia" in 1377. The new exalted regal position demanded a change in the way that the ruler and his lineage were perceived, and this was reflected in ruling ideology, heraldry, the emphasis which was placed on genealogy etc. In the fifteenth century,

[1] The existing literature about the Kotromanići is extensive but of very unequal quality. See Pejo Ćošković, Kotromanići, in: Hrvatski biografski leksikon, Vol. 7: Kam–Ko. Zagreb 2009, 723–40, with a comprehensive bibliography that includes older works.

a Kotromanić "origin story" existed in Ragusa, which was probably also nurtured within the family itself, about a common ancestor and supposed foreign origins of the dynasty.

This work will seek to fill an obvious gap in the dynastic landscape of late medieval Europe by drawing attention to an important ruling house and their Kingdom, which has been somewhat neglected in historiography. By describing how the identity of a dynasty was constructed and expressed in medieval Bosnia, I will attempt to position the Kotromanić family among the other ruling dynasties of East-Central Europe in the Middle Ages. I intend to achieve this by combining a variety of textual and material contemporary sources, which will be compared to similar examples from the region.

The process of generating greater dynastic self-consciousness and the necessity of transmitting notions of a shared ancestral past evolved as a response to the profound changes in Bosnia at the beginning of the fifteenth century, corresponding to the rise of nobility and the growth of external pressures on the Kingdom. Therefore, in the context of the topic, special attention will be given to understanding the mechanisms through which members of the ruling dynasty developed a discourse of legitimacy based on a tradition about their predecessors and what models they relied on in doing so.

The Kotromanić Dynastic Name in Historical Records

Even though the Kotromanići represented a longstanding and extremely significant kindred that was deeply embedded into the society of Bosnia, their name, which has almost become synonymous with the Bosnian Kingdom in modern times, appears relatively late in historical sources. It was not recorded in any of the surviving royal charters or the preserved documents from the twelfth, thirteenth or fourteenth century. In fact, in the archives of the medieval Mediterranean commune of Ragusa the name Kotromanić was mentioned for the first time in 1403, in the context of the contemporary political turmoil in Bosnia caused by King Ostoja's (r. 1398–1404; 1409–1418) war against Ragusa. Attempting to achieve a resolution of the conflict through diplomatic means, the small coastal commune entrusted two of its nobles, Michael de Resti and Francho de Basilio, with a mission to travel north to Hungary and deliberate with King Sigismund of Luxembourg (r. 1387–1437) about the best way in which the war could be ended to their advantage. On 16 November 1403, the Ragusans composed a detailed directive to their ambassadors, ordering them to find and meet Duke Hrvoje Vukčić along the way. As a representative of King Ladislaus of Naples (r. 1386–1414), he was the most influential baron between the Adriatic Sea and Buda at the time, and the envoys were supposed to discuss with him the current political situation in Bosnia. The Ragusans intended to use Hrvoje's discord with Ostoja in order to bring a new monarch to the Bosnian throne. Describing King Ostoja as a "homo de picolla condicion," the messengers were instructed to flatter the duke and suggest to him that he should take the royal crown for himself. However, if for some reason he did not agree with them, they were supposed to remind him that there are better and more suitable members of the Kotromanić family than Ostoja, who would listen

and obey the duke's will, working to the best interest of him and his son. Resti and Basilio were then ordered to tell Hrvoje that he was much better acquainted with those Kotromanići in Bosnia than they were, but that one of them, called Pavle Radišić, resided in Ragusa for the past two years. They could testify that he was a good, discreet and devoted person. They were convinced that he would be obedient to the duke and his son.[2]

The result of these negotiations was a pact concluded in January 1404 between Duke Hrvoje and the Ragusans, whereby the duke indeed obliged to support Pavle Radišić with his army and to proclaim him king of Bosnia, while the Ragusans committed themselves to mediate in negotiations that were to be conducted between the duke and King Sigismund.[3] But despite this agreement in principle, events in Bosnia did not go according to the desired plan of the Ragusan government because the Bosnian nobility decided to choose a different candidate for the royal throne. Already on 29 May 1404, the Ragusans devised another set of instructions, this time for Pasquale de Resti and Marin de Bona, their elected ambassadors sent on a diplomatic mission to Bosnia. The two were supposed to meet Duke Hrvoje and clandestinely enquire with him about the identity of the future king. Having heard his opinion, they were then ordered to ask him: "Who would be a better lord than yourself?" If he was to contradict their flattering claims, they were then instructed to ask: "Who else can be proclaimed other than someone from the Kotromanići who are rulers from ancient times? You know them better and you know all the Kotromanići, while we do not know any others apart from the one which is in Ragusa."[4]

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[2] "In quanto non ve paresse attender a tuor la segnoria per vui, nui ve reccordemo che sono deli Chotromanichi de meliori et plu discretti de Hostoya, li qual plu ve ascolterave, et serave in tutto cum vuy et cum lo vostro fiol, al ben et accrescimento vostro. De quelli che son in Bossina nuy non potemo havere cossi bon noticia come vuy, ma de quello che nuy ve possemo recordar et testificar qui in Ragusa e uno el qual ha nome Pavel Radissich, et e sta cum nuy do anni passadi, de luy possemo dir, ch el e persona da ben et discretta et acostumato assay devoto a signor. Et parne certificar che el serave ala hobediencia vostra et del vostro fiol." (16 November 1403), Dubrovnik State Archives (hereinafter: DSA), Lettere di Levante, Vol. 4, fol. 51v–52r. Cf. Lajos Thallóczy / József Gelcich, Diplomatarium relationum Reipublicae Ragusanae cum Regno Hungariae. Budapest 1887, 134.

[3] Ljubomir Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1. Beograd, Sremski Karlovci 1929, 455–7. See also Neven Isailović, Ugovor hercega Hrvoja Vukčića Hrvatinića i Dubrovčana o savezu protiv bosanskog kralja Stefana Ostoje, *Stari srpski arhiv* 8 (2009), 167–81.

[4] "Item siando cum lo cherzech debiate dir in secreto da luy a vuy che pensa Bossina de crear segnor. Et se luy dixesse de zo se pensa, et vuy dicete: 'Qui po crear meior segnor de vuy, et aço dovete meter lo cuore che vuy vedete come se porto Hostoya inverso vuy'? Et se ello contradicesse de voler esser segnor, luy et vuy dicete: 'Adoncha, qui altro se po far cha uno de li Cotromanichi che foron segnori ab antiquo? Et vuy li sapete meyo che cognoscete tutti li Cotromanichi. Et nuy non sapemo salve quello che e a Ragusa elqual in quanto praticassemo cum luy ne par un bono homo et humano asay, et de bona discrecion, et in quanto potemo veder in luy ve serave in tuto hobediente et mantignirave quello che ve prometesse. Idio va dato gracia che sete savio et saperete congosser et elleger quello sera

The cited statements of Ragusan diplomats testify that only members of the Kotromanić dynasty could have been considered as suitable contenders for the throne in Bosnia. That not even the powerful Duke Hrvoje Vukčić did not, or maybe could not change this old custom, was confirmed already on an assembly held in early June 1404 when the nobles of Bosnia expectedly chose one of the Kotromanići to be their ruler. Duke Hrvoje wasted little time in spreading the good news and swiftly informed the Republic of Venice that the Bosnian barons inaugurated Tvrtko II Tvrtković (r. 1404–1409; 1420–1443) – the young son of the first Bosnian King Tvrtko (r. 1353–1391), who was a Venetian citizen.[5]

Although it was not mentioned regularly during the subsequent decades, the name of the ruling dynasty did appear from time to time in Ragusan diplomatic sources. For instance, on 15 February 1415 the Ragusan government comforted King Tvrtko II, who had been deposed in the meantime and who attempted to regain the throne, by stating: "from the very beginnings of our place and our ancestors, Ragusa was an honest and reliable home to the glorious lords of Kotromanići and the nobles of the Bosnian state."[6] Tvrtko II managed to reclaim the royal crown in 1420, and eleven years later Johannes de Gondola and Nicholas de Georgio, elected Ragusan ambassadors residing at his court, were directed to gain the king's favour by mentioning the great love that existed between their commune and the "progeny of the Kotromanići, royals of Bosnia".[7] Furthermore, in January of 1432, the same pair of diplomats were ordered to speak to the king about the cordial friendship that Ragusa always had with the "royal and famous house of the Kotromanići, the principal house of the crown of Bosnia".[8] Many years

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el meyor." (29 May 1404), DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 4, fol. 67r. Cf. Mihailo Dinić, Državni sabor srednjovekovne Bosne. Beograd 1955, 75.

[5] "Insuper quia dictus ambaxiator dicit, quod dominus Crevoia congratulatur nobiscum, significando, quod barones Bossine concorditer expulerunt Ostoiam, olim regem Bossine, de regno, et istituerunt alium regem Bossine, videlicet filium Tvertchonis olim regem Bossine, qui erat civis noster […]" (31 July 1404), Šime Ljubić, Listine o odnošajih izmedju južnoga Slavenstva i Mletačke republike, Vol. 5: 1403–1409. Zagreb 1875, 45. See also Pavo Živković, Tvrtko II Tvrtković. Bosna u prvoj polovini XV stoljeća. Sarajevo 1981, 22.

[6] 15 February 1415, Medo Pucić, Spomenici srbski od 1395. do 1423. Beograd 1858, 126; Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 502.

[7] "Serenissimo Re, non fa di mestiero com gran parole remembrare, pero che non tanto a Idio alqual nulla cosa e cellata ma a tutto lo mondo et a ogni generacion che in esso habita manifesto et paleso, e quanto intrinsicamente com grande ardore et amore la progenie deli Cotromanichi, reali de Bosna, zascuno in sua singularita, e special et principalmente la bona memoria del serenissimo padre vostro, semper sia stata conzonta et abia amato e carita grandissima portato alla cita et zentilomeni di Ragusa [...]" (25 November 1431), DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 11, fol. 63v.

[8] "Serenissimo re, per lo bon amor e cordial amititia la qual sempre e stata et e tra la regal e famosa casa deli Cotromanich e Ragusa, principal casa dila corona di Bosna [...]" (19 January 1432), DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 11, fol. 68r.

later, on 17 May 1456, Francesco de Benessa, Ragusan envoy to Bosnian King Stefan Tomaš (r. 1443–1461), was instructed to remind the ruler about the sincere and pure benevolence that his predecessors showed to their city, and the similar love and appreciation that the city displayed to his lordship and the "most noble and royal house of Kotromanići."[9]

The reason why the dynastic name emerges so late and features so infrequently in historical sources is most probably down to the belated construction of dynastic identity, but also due to the specific circumstances in which the ruling family evolved and developed. Namely, in Bosnia and the broader South Slavic world in the Middle Ages, there was a practice whereby individuals bore patronymic surnames derived from their father's given name, nickname or title, and which changed from generation to generation.[10] Prior to the fifteenth century, no Bosnian ruler had ever been recorded in contemporary sources as having a surname, and it appears that no importance had been attached to the issue.[11] Nevertheless, the patronymic principle was consistently applied throughout the fifteenth century. The last four kings of the Bosnian Kingdom were generally known by their patronymics, i.e. Tvrtković (son of Tvrtko), Ostojić (son of Ostoja) and Tomašević (son of Tomaš), with which they almost regularly appear in sources, rather than by the collective dynastic name of Kotromanić. They resorted to this practice in order to legitimate their position in relation to their predecessor and royal father, but this also meant that the name of the dynasty appeared rarely and only in those instances when the documents specifically referred to the group as a whole. There was probably not much need to use it in official correspondence before the 1400s, and this partially explains the circumstance why it took so long for the name to appear in written records. However, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, the ruling dynasty grew both vertically and horizontally, it spread and branched out so much that it became difficult to follow all the lineages that stemmed from it. Thereby the Kotromanić name was used as a means to unify and unite all the differently named and surnamed members of the broader ruling dynasty.

The rise of the Kotromanić name does not only imply a consolidation of an elite community based on blood ties but also suggests the invention of a political construct which was used to the

[9] "[...] considerando el rezimento di Ragusi, la sincere et pura benivolentia la qual sempre ha portata li precessori vostri et anche la maiesta vostra alla lor citta, et per lo simile l'amore et dilectione dessa Citta verso la la [!] signoria vostra et verso la [~~casa di~~] nobilissima et regia casa di Cotromanichi, de la qual ne augmento quello che altre volte fexeno per la bona memoria de madonna Lasauta et fioli […]" (17 May 1456), DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 16, fol. 146r.

[10] Patronymic surnames in medieval Bosnia are discussed by Esad Kurtović, Radosalići – Primjer "jednokratnih prezimena" srednjega vijeka. Beograd 2009.

[11] Modern historians have retrospectively introduced last names for Stjepan I, who is now usually but erroneously referred to as Kotroman, as well as for his son Stjepan II and grandson Tvrtko both of who are frequently and conventionally mentioned with the Kotromanić name. See, for instance, John V. A. Fine, The Late Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest. Ann Arbor/MI 1994, 275–6.

advantage of the ruling structures in the Kingdom. In this way, the genealogical connections served as a foundation which was deliberately enhanced by different political, ideological, and social elements to create and develop an identity, as well as promoting loyalty to the dynasty.[12] It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the kings of Bosnia began emphasising the various aspects of their dynastic identity as a response to the growing strength of the Bosnian nobility which, by the beginning of the fifteenth century almost relegated the ruler to a *primus inter pares*, surpassing him in political importance.[13] It thus became necessary to clearly articulate and strengthen the self-consciousness of the dynasty and its members in order to reclaim their dominant role in the functioning of the state. The kings defined their monarchical position by assertively demonstrating that they belonged to an old and established hereditary line of sovereign rulers. To understand this multifaceted process and how the mechanisms of dynasty operated in Bosnia, we must first attempt to define certain key concepts and terms regarding the internal structure, character and kinship ties among the Kotromanići as the ruling house of the Bosnian Kingdom.

Development of the Royal Kindred. Blood Ties and Issues of Succession

The Italian word used to describe the "noble and royal" dynasty of Kotromanići in the Ragusan documents from 1432 and 1456 was *casa*, i.e. *house* or *household*. This term could have had a variety of different meanings depending on the context in which it was communicated. Contemporaries often used this expression to label what we now understand as a social unit consisting of a vast number of interconnected and related families that were linked by their common paternal lineage, comprising of both past and future generations.[14] Since this is a rare recorded instance when an attribute is given to describe the Kotromanići as a group, it is therefore quite difficult to rely on terminology to define the precise structure of their social formation and to determine whether they were considered as a nuclear or extended

[12] Zbigniew Dalewski, Patterns of Dynastic Identity in the Early Middle Ages, *Acta Poloniae Historica* 107 (2013), 5–43, 26.

[13] See Sima Ćirković, Rusaška gospoda, *Istorijski časopis* 31 (1974), 5–17.

[14] Erik Fügedi, The Elefanthy. The Hungarian Nobleman and his Kindred. Budapest 1998, 3. See also Karl Schmid, Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht, Haus und Dynastie beim mittelalterlichen Adel, *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 105 (1957), 1–62. For a general discussion of dynasties in a global context, see Jeroen Duindam, Dynasties. A Global History of Power, 1300–1800. Cambridge 2016; Marie Favereau Doumenjou / Liesbeth Geevers, The Golden Horde, the Spanish Hasburg Monarchy, and the Construction of Ruling Dynasties, in: Maaike van Berkel / Jeroen Duindam (Eds.), Prince, Pen, and Sword. Eurasian Perspectives. Leiden, Boston/MA 2018, 452–512.

family, a tribe or a clan. In this particular case, however, the word *casa* might have been used to denote the ruling dynasty as just one line of an extensive aristocratic kindred. From other existing sources, it can be established that the Kotromanići were in fact a large conglomerate or community of male representatives of various branches, families and smaller kinship units who had a legal right to property based on the fact that they claimed descent from a common ancestor.[15] In other words, they acted as what was known in Hungarian Latin sources as a *genus* or *generatio*, in Slavic *pleme* or *rod*, and which corresponds to what is known in German as *Sippe* or in English as *kindred*. As a basic form of kinship structure of nobility in the region during the Middle Ages, the kindred changed essentially over time, and in the latter stages of its development it became a kind of a "loose assembly of separate families."[16] The coherence of this group was then usually expressed through the use of a common family name, as has already been discussed, and heraldic insignia, to which we will turn later.[17]

Even though the complete family tree of the dynasty cannot be fully reconstructed from the available sources because of the large gaps and inconsistency in the documentary material, and although it is impossible to reassemble all the kinship ties among the various members of the royal family, most of the evidence at our disposal corroborates the argument that *kindred* is the most appropriate label for the Kotromanići. There are clear indications that by the fifteenth century the family expanded to such an extent that they represented and behaved like a typical noble kindred, i.e. a "totality of a nobleman's descendants over multiple generations" in which "all male descendants appear as *fratres* and their relationship is governed by the order of descent."[18]

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[15] Fügedi, The Elefanthy, 4–5, 21. Kinship structures in medieval Bosnia have not yet been fully researched or properly understood. For a discussion of problems regarding terminology in historiography and an attempt to organize a systematic approach to kinship issues in territories adjacent to Bosnia, see: Damir Karbić, The Šubići of Bribir. A Case Study of a Croatian Medieval Kindred, unpublished PhD thesis. Budapest 2000, 179–212; idem, Hrvatski plemićki rod i običajno pravo, *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za društvene i povijesne znanosti HAZU* 16 (1998), 73–117; Ivan Jurković, Vrhrički i hlivanjski plemeniti rod Čubranića do sredine 15. stoljeća, *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za društvene i povijesne znanosti HAZU* 24 (2006), 25–69, 25–27. See also Martyn Rady, Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary. New York 2000, 22–27, 96–97.

[16] Karbić, The Šubići of Bribir, 446. A comparison can be drawn with the better documented case of the Bosnian Kosača kindred which in 1429 consisted of "four houses," i.e. seperate families. Esad Kurtović, Veliki vojvoda bosanski Sandalj Hranić Kosača. Sarajevo 2009, 67–74; Đuro Tošić, Sporedna grana plemena Kosača, *Zbornik za istoriju BiH* 3 (2002), 61–77.

[17] Fügedi, The Elefanthy, 5. On "family" as a concept which had to be "constructed" during the Middle Ages, see Constance Brittain Bouchard, "Those of My Blood". Constructing Noble Families in Medieval Francia. Philadelphia/PA 2001.

[18] Fügedi, The Elefanthy, 20.

This would explain why, for example, King Dabiša (r. 1391–1395) calls his predecessor Tvrtko "brother,"[19] a practice which was also continued by King Ostoja,[20] even though it is impossible to determine the blood relationship between these three rulers with more precision, and it is highly unlikely that they indeed were siblings. The convention of referring to royal predecessors as *brothers* was usually dismissed by historians either as epistolary etiquette, as a ceremonial phrase copied from previous charters or as a mere ritual formula for showing respect to an equal.[21] But the expression *frater* appears without any accurate specification in a great number of Hungarian sources. Through a comparative approach based on other documents, it has been positively established that in many cases this term was used to denote a cousin.[22] Therefore, Tvrtko, Dabiša, and Ostoja were most probably relatives, members of the same kindred, who might have belonged to one generational sequence. They shared a common ancestor, and contemporaries considered all three of them suitable to be rulers.

The patrimonial understanding of society and politics in which power exclusively belonged to one privileged and favoured family is, perhaps, best viewed in the context of the rules of royal succession in medieval Bosnia, where the usual model of inheritance did not follow the principle of primogeniture, as it did in some other European monarchies of that time. This meant that the son did not routinely inherit his father on the throne, but that the right to elect and install a new monarch belonged to the Bosnian aristocracy which acted within a framework of a state diet.[23] As the analysed documents prove, the diet was limited to choosing only from among the Kotromanići as a broad group, but it is evident that there was not just one line of the kindred which had an absolute claim to the throne. This is precisely why we do not know all the kinship ties among the various members of the ruling dynasty and the absence of an obvious naming pattern in which no names are repeated in sequence also makes it difficult to reconstruct the relations between the successors to the royal throne of King Tvrtko I.

For instance, both Dabiša and Ostoja were undoubtedly members of the Kotromanić dynasty and cousins of their predecessor King Tvrtko I. Still, the exact degree of their kinship bonds cannot be established. Certain historians considered Ostoja to be the illegitimate son

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[19] 17 July 1392, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 174; 17 May 1395, Franz Miklosich, Monumenta Serbica Spectantia Historiam Serbiae Bosnae Ragusii. Viennae 1858, 226.

[20] 20 November 1398, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 419; 5 February 1399, ibidem, 426.

[21] For a discussion of how the term brother was applied in neighbouring Serbia, with some references to examples from Bosnia, see Miloš Blagojević, Srodstvena terminologija i društvena hijerarhija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji. Brat i braća, in: Jasna Bjeladinović-Jergić (Ed.), Zbornik Etnografskog muzeja u Beogradu 1901–2001. Beograd 2001, 115–29.

[22] Fügedi, The Elefanthy, 20.

[23] For a comprehensive overview of the competencies of the Bosnian state diet, see Dinić, Državni sabor srednjovekovne Bosne.

of King Tvrtko since Ostoja's son, King Tomaš, referred to King Tvrko II as his "uncle."[24] Some early modern authors considered Ostoja to have belonged to the Jablanović branch of the Kotromanići,[25] and the situation is additionally complicated by the circumstance that Ostoja's illegitimate sons, Tomaš, Radivoj and Radič, appeared in contemporary sources with the surname Kristić.[26]

Furthermore, our confusion is not restricted only to those members of the kindred who managed to rule the country, but also extends to those individuals who could have staked a claim to the royal throne. The example of Pavle Radišić, whose surname potentially reveals only his father's name and nothing else about his origin or identity, has already been mentioned. Undoubtedly a Kotromanić himself, he was thought of as an enemy of King Ostoja and at one point in time was even considered to be a serious candidate for the crown.[27] But perhaps even more enlightening is the curious case of another member of the ruling dynasty who sought refuge in Ragusa during the 1420s. Namely, at the very beginning of the second reign of Tvrtko II, the king complained to the Ragusans that they allowed unhindered lodging in their city to a certain Vuk Grubačević, who was "also known as Banić."[28] In 1423 Pasqual de Resti and Marin de Gondola, Ragusan ambassadors to the Bosnian royal court, wrote to their government about the issue, and on 16 February they received instructions how to respond to the accusations. Vuk,

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[24] 20 December 1443, Šime Ljubić, Listine o odnošajih izmedju južnoga Slavenstva i Mletačke republike, Vol. 9: 1423–1459. Zagreb 1890, 178; 15 April 1444, ibidem, 190; 27 May 1444, Lajos Thallóczy, Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter. München, Leipzig 1914, 366; 7 January 1456, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 121.

[25] Gregor Čremošnik, Prodaja bosanskog Primorja Dubrovniku god. 1399. i kralj Ostoja, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 40 (1928), 109–26, 111.

[26] "Strenuus miles Restoe prothobestiarius et ambasiator serenissimi domini Thomaxii Christich nouelli regis Bosne […]", 3 June 1444, DSA, Diversa Notariae, Vol. 27, fol. 151r; "[…] ecclesia sancti Georgii in Thesagn, ordinis sancti Francisci Bosnensis diocesis, quam dilectus filius nobilis vir Radivoi Charstich, ut accepimus, fundavit et erexit […]", 23 March 1461, Augustin Theiner, Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia, Vol. 2. Romae 1860, 373; "Prima pars est de concedendo de pulvere bombarde comiti Radiz Christich, barbano majestatis regis Bosne, qui est in Cresgneuo." 29 May 1463, DSA, Consilium rogatorum, Vol. 17, fol. 222r.

[27] "[…] et le terre che l' re Ostoya ne aueua dato lo ditto ne tolleua per nostra colpa, digando che rezetasemo misser Paual Radissich so inimigo come mostrera per soi messi dauanti lo so et nostro signor […] Prima schusate del Radissich che per soa chaxon non ne mosse Guerra." 19 December 1403, Thallóczy / Gelcich, Diplomatarium, 151. For more about the stay of Pavle Radišić in Ragusa, and how it was percieved by contemporary Ragusans, see Neven Isailović, Dva dokumenta iz XV veka o verbalnim deliktima Dubrovčana i Bosanaca, *Mešovita građa* 31 (2010), 23–38, 29–34.

[28] "Et prima per lo facto di Volcho Grubacevich dicto Banich", 11 March 1423, DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 8, fol. 154v. Cf. Ćiro Truhelka, Vuk Banić-Kotromanić (Po vijestima dubrovačke arhive), *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 27 (1915), 359–63.

who was referred to as Kotromanić in this instance, obviously represented a potential threat to Tvrtko's position on the throne, so the king wanted him removed from Ragusa and banished to one of the nearby islands. The envoys were ordered to reply that theirs was always a free and open city for anybody to come and leave as they pleased, that they never allowed anyone to harm this freedom and liberty which also, incidentally, suited the kings and nobles of Bosnia to their great pleasure and service. They were also instructed to remind the king that even some of the Kotromanići and their opponents enjoyed this liberty when they sought refuge in Ragusa.[29] Despite the king's protests, the Ragusans refrained from expelling Vuk who remained a thorn in the diplomatic relations between Bosnia and Ragusa until 1428 when he finally left the city of his own free will. Determining Vuk's parentage on the basis of his two surnames – Banić and Grubačević – has proven elusive thus far, and the improbable assumption that he might be identical to the nephew of King Ostoja mentioned with the same name in 1412,[30] only shows how little we know about the wider branches of the Kotromanić genealogical tree.

Based on these examples, the issues of succession in Bosnia might seem disorganised, chaotic, complicated and challenging to make sense of. That is until we compare them to the early stages of development of monarchy and dynasty in the Poland of the Piasts, Bohemia of the Přemyslids and Hungary of the Árpáds. As the research of Zbigniew Dalewski has shown, by the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century the circle of people who had an equal right to rule in the aforementioned countries was not restricted to the narrow family of the ruler but also happened to incorporate his close and distant relatives as well. And since all members of the broader ruling kindred endorsed the communal nature of monarchical power which entitled them to rule, being eligible to potentially acquire the throne after the death of the previous ruler did not depend on the proximity of kinship but was already implied by the fact that the candidate was a member of the wider ruling family.[31]

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[29] "Per Volcho Cotromanich avemo inteso per le prime vostre lettere quanto per lo re vi fu decto che noi non lo ritegnessimo in Ragusa, et da poy per una altra letera vedemo che voleva che noi ritegnissimo el dito Volcho et mandassimo a qualche isola delle et non lassarlo da noi per bene et destro de quello segnore Re et pero vi dicemo che in caso che messer lo Re non vi dicesse piu alcuna cosa sopra di questa facenda, non parlate piu ne anche voi supra di cio. Ma sel vi dira qualche cosa domandandovi de ditto Volcho dite cosi serenissimo Re: la cita di Ragusa fu sempre libera et francha a ciascheduno de andare et vegnire also piacere et tanto costumatamente et honestamente ha usada questa sua franchisia et liberta non nocendo ne lassando nocere ad alguno, che tuti li Re et signori di Bosna anno reputato et abudo per gran piacere et servigio quando alguni di Cotromanich o altri lor contrarii si son ridocti di qua in Ragusa […]". 16 February 1424), DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 8, fol. 145r.

[30] 16 May 1412, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 442; Ćiro Truhelka, Crtice iz srednjega vijeka (Na osnovu dubrovačkih arhivalija), *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 20 (1908), 419–31, 429.

[31] Zbigniew Dalewski, Family Business. Dynastic Power in Central Europe in the Earlier Middle Ages, *Viator* 46 (2015), No. 1, 43–60, 4. See also idem, Modele władzy dynastycznej w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej we wcześniejszym średniowieczu. Warszawa 2014.

Whereas the principles of succession in these East-Central European polities evolved with time, and the rulers built up their regal position by transforming the broad horizontal kindred into a narrow vertically-oriented patrilineal dynastic structure by the time of the later Middle Ages,[32] in Bosnia certain archaic institutions and traditional values survived well into the fifteenth century.[33] It does seem, though, that some kind of kinship change occurred by the end of the 1200s, when the structure of descent in the ruling kindred was altered from being bilateral, meaning that every biological ancestor and descendant represented a socially recognised relative, into a unilineal agnatic principle in which kinship was traced only through a single line of male ancestors.[34] This resulted in temporary stability regarding the succession pattern throughout the largest part of the fourteenth century, but after the death of King Tvrtko in 1391 succession rules returned to the earlier norms and monarchical power was once again perceived as belonging to the entire kindred which by that time included a variety of closer or distant individuals, families, lineages or groups, all holding equal shares and participating proportionately in the division of authority.

This concept of dispersing power, wealth and prestige among the sovereign's relatives strengthened the dominant position of the dynasty within the monarchy. It helped its members maintain their monopoly on the crown. By relying on this model of succession, the dynasty could then perpetuate itself regardless of the ruler's capacity to produce a biological male heir. The right of all members to partake in reigning also demonstrated the superior status of the royal house and made it stand out in relation to other noble families who were beginning to rise on the social ladder by imitating or associating themselves with the ruling family.[35] Another way in which the rulers could rise further above their subjects was by frequently mentioning and referring to their royal predecessors.

Ancestral Genealogies, Political Programmes, Fathers and Forefathers

By the fifteenth century, the Kotromanići were regarded as a deep-rooted and longstanding dynasty whose members were deemed to be "segnori ab antiquo."[36] And indeed, this was not the first recorded instance when Bosnian rulers used this legitimating device to assert their

[32] Dalewski, Family Business, 13–14.

[33] Sima Ćirković, Ostaci starije društvene strukture u bosanskom feudalnom društvu, *Istoriski glasnik* 3–4 (1958), 155–64.

[34] For more on this structural shift in the configuration of kinship ties across Europe, see David Warren Sabean / Simon Teuscher, Kinship in Europe. A New Approach to Long Term Development, in: David Warren Sabean / Simon Teuscher / Jon Mathieu (Eds.), Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900). New York, Oxford 2007, 1–32, 4–5.

[35] See Dalewski, Family Business, 10.

[36] 29 May 1404, DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 4, fol. 67r.

position to competing rivals by claiming that their ancestors reigned since indeterminate ancient times. Acting upon threats to his country stemming from accusations of heresy, Ban Matej Ninoslav (r. ca. 1233–1250) defended his right to govern Bosnia by invoking his "progenitors" as early as 1233. In that year he received a written response from Pope Gregory IX in which the pontiff took him under papal protection, for as long as he remained loyal to the Catholic faith, forbidding anybody to contest his possession of that land which, as Ninoslav claimed, his "ancestors who were infected with heretical perversion peacefully possessed from the old times."[37] The pope also took it upon himself to write to Duke Coloman of Slavonia and remind him that "according to ancient customs" Ban Ninoslav and his ancestors granted and distributed the counties and villages of their land to whomever they pleased.[38] Even though the papal chancery obviously reproduced whole portions from the letter that it received from Bosnia, Ninoslav's assertion could not entirely have been without basis, and it is difficult to believe that both the pope and Duke Coloman would be so easily deceived by a completely false statement. However, due to a lack of documentary evidence, there is no way of determining the exact relation of Ban Ninoslav with the known and established previous rulers of Bosnia. In all of the preserved charters, he only makes one reference to Ban Kulin (r. ca. 1180–1203) but does not state the nature or degree of their kinship.[39] In fact, between the last information about Ban Kulin's reign and the earliest recorded mention of Ban Matej Ninoslav in 1233, there are three dark decades without almost any contemporary written sources about the individual on the Bosnian throne.[40] But even in the Middle Ages, a gap of three decades was

[37] "Te igitur sincere caritatis brachiis amplexantes, personam et terram tuam de Bosna cum omnibus bonis, que impresentiarum rationabiliter possides, sub beati Petri etc. usque communimus, districtius inhibentes, ne quis te in fide catholica permanentem super eadem terra, quam, sicut asseris, progenitores tui, qui fuerunt vitio heretice pravitatis infecti, ab antiquo pacifice possederunt, presumat indebite molestare, iure Carissimi in Christo filii nostril […]", 10 October 1233, Augustin Theiner, Vetera Monumenta Historica Hungariam Sacram Illustrantia, Vol. 1. Romae 1859, 120.

[38] "Karissimo in Christo filio Colomanno Regi Illustri salutem etc. Dilecto filio nobili viro Ninosclavo Duce de Bosna, nobis innotuit, referente, quod cum progenitores sui de antiqua consuetudine Comitatus et alias Villas terre sue concesserint, et abstulerint quibuscumque, prout eis proprie voluntatis arbitrium suggerebat, eo nuper ab heresi ad fidem catholicam, domino faciente, converso, et hereticos expugnante, detentores Comitatuum et aliarum terrarum Ducatus sui predicte consuetudini refragantur, Comitatus et terras easdem contra voluntatem eius temere detinendo. Quare nobis humiliter supplicavit, ut cum ipse deterioris conditionis esse non debeat, quam dicti progenitores eiusdem, qui fuerunt vitio heretice pravitatis infecti, super hoc adesse sibi favore benivolo dignaremur." 10 October 1233, ibidem, 120.

[39] 1232–1235, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 6.

[40] In August of 1236 Pope Gregory IX placed under papal protection a certain Sibislav, knez of Usora, who was "nato quondam Stephani Bani de Bosna," and his mother Ancilla, "relictam quondam St. Bani de Bosna." The pontiff stated that among the princes of the Bosnian diocese, who were "infected with the stain of heretical depravity," they existed like "lilies among spines." Theiner, Vetera Monumenta

not considered an especially long time, and it is quite possible that both Kulin and Ninoslav could have had same ancestors and that they belonged to the same kindred.[41]

Taking into account that the proximity of kinship was not the most important aspect of royal succession in medieval Bosnia, Ban Ninoslav did not necessarily have to be a direct blood descendant of Ban Kulin. It was enough that they shared a common progenitor. Using the same principle, we can also solve the dilemma of Ban Ninoslav's successor. Namely, even though he had sons who could have inherited his position on the throne,[42] Ninoslav was nevertheless succeeded by a person named Prijezda (r. ca. 1250–1287). Judging on the basis of existing sources, the new ruler did not come to power in Bosnia unusually or violently, but, by all accounts, he was also a member of one single kindred from which candidates for the throne were chosen.

This Prijezda plays a central role in the Kotromanić story since he is the first known individual who definitely belonged to the notable ruling family, and it is, therefore, essential to present as much relevant information about him as possible. In 1233 a certain "nobilis vir Ubanus dictus Priesda" was recorded as a *consanguineus*, i.e. a blood relative of Ban Matej Ninoslav. At that time *Ubanus* Prijezda was old enough to hand his son over to Dominican friars as a pledge of his Catholicism.[43] The degree of kinship between Ninoslav and Prijezda cannot be determined with any amount of certainty based on the information given in the text of the document, and it is also disputable whether this Prijezda was identical to the one who succeeded Ninoslav on the Bosnian throne some two decades later. In a chronological sense, this was completely possible, even though some historians thought it unlikely that someone who was old enough to father a son in 1233 could live and rule until at least 1287.[44] Nevertheless, even if these are two different individuals with the same name, there are still no objective reasons to believe that Ban Ninoslav and Ban Prijezda who reigned after him could not have belonged to the same kindred.

Historica Hungariam Sacram Illustrantia, Vol. 1, 147. There are no other recorded mentions of this Ban Stjepan of Bosnia in other sources, and it is assumed he ruled some time between the reigns of Ban Kulin and Ban Ninoslav. It should be mentioned that Ban Kulin had a son, but it is not known whether his name was Stjepan.

41 In one document issued at the beginning of 1235, Ninoslav swears to uphold the peace and justice with the Ragusan commune, as it "stood in the time of my elders." Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 7.

42 In his charter to Ragusa Ninoslav makes reference both to his sons and to his grandchildren. 22 March 1240, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 8.

43 "Dilectus filius nobilis vir Ninosclavus Dux de Bosna nobis exposuit, et nos libenter audivimus, et gaudemus, quod vestre sollicitudinis studio procurante, nobilis vir Ubanus dictus Priesda consanguineus eius nuper ab immunditia pravitatis heretice rediit ad catholice fidei puritatem […]". 10 October 1233, Theiner, Vetera Monumenta Historica Hungariam Sacram Illustrantia, Vol. 1, 120.

44 See, for instance, Nada Klaić, Srednjovjekovna Bosna. Zagreb 1989, 165–68, who thinks that throughout the thirteenth century there were three different individuals all named Prijezda who bore the title of ban.

Scattered mentions of Prijezda in other available sources give the impression that he was one of Ninoslav's closest associates and that he managed to rule Bosnia in his own right for almost 40 years. He accompanied Ninoslav in his official entourage during a visit to Ragusa in 1240[45] and in a much later transcript of a document dated to the same year he was even mentioned with the title of ban himself.[46] From a charter issued in 1255, we learn that the Hungarian King Bela IV gave him the county of Novak, south of the Drava River, near Virovitica in Slavonia.[47] Still, his sons, Stjepan and Prijezda, ceded these possessions in 1267.[48] Ban Prijezda's sons, Stjepan, Prijezda and Vuk, were mentioned once again in a charter from 1287 with which their father gave a county in Bosnia to his unnamed daughter and her husband Ladislav, son of Stjepan III Babonić of Blagaj.[49] It is assumed that the old Ban Prijezda probably died soon after this and was succeeded by his son Stjepan, who already appears with the title of ban in a document approximately dated to 1287.[50]

From then on it becomes easier to trace the subsequent Bosnian rulers in available sources, partly down to the increased frequency with which diplomatic material appears in the ensuing period, but also partly because Prijezda's direct descendants managed to keep their grip on the Bosnian throne for more than a century after his death. The genealogy of Prijezda's line can practically be fully reconstructed from the charter of his great-grandson Ban Tvrtko issued in

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[45] 22 March 1240, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 7.

[46] October 1240, Gusztáv Wenzel, Codex diplomaticus Arpadianus continuatus, Vol. 7. Pest 1869, 111–2. The document in question was issued in 1356, see Magyar Országos Levéltár, DL-DF 222.

[47] 30 March 1255, Ivan Krst. Tkalčić, Povjestni spomenici Zagrebačke biskupije XII. i XIII. stoljeća, Vol. 1. Zagreb 1873, 103–4.

[48] Georgius Fejér, Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, Vol. 4/3. Budae 1829, 424–26.

[49] "Priyezda domino concedente banus Boznensis […] et de benivolentia filiorum nostrorum Stephani, Priyezda et Vich […]". 8 May 1287, Lajos Thallóczy / Samu Barabás, A Blagay-Család Oklevéltára. Budapest 1897, 53.

[50] In a letter that has not been precisely dated, but believed to be issued in 1287, Ban Stjepan, the son of Prijezda, and his brother Prijezda are named as targets for a proposed upcoming crusade against heretics: "Sane quia circa predicacionem et assignacionem uexilli uiuifice Crucis aduersum perfidiam predictarum gencium scelestarum et specialiter Stephanum banum, filium Pezde et Pezdam fratrem eiusdem, ac homines et terras ipsorum imperijs et dominio subiectis, qui in patarenis erroribus et dampnalibus ritibus indurati, uel eciam […]", Ferdinandus Knauz, Monumenta Ecclesiae Strigoniensis, Vol. 2. Strigonii 1882, 422–3. Stjepan and Prijezda appear in papal correspondence once again in July of 1290: "In e. m. nobilibus viris Stephano et Brisde banis Bosne," Theiner, Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia, Vol. 1, 365. The address on the letter is formulated in such a way that some historians thought that Stjepan and his brother Prijezda shared power and the title of Bosnian ban that came with it. However, Dinić, Državni sabor srednjovekovne Bosne, 32, argues convincingly that Stjepan was the only true ruler in Bosnia at the time.

1356 when he confirmed the granting of the possession of Dubica to the Church of St. Peter in Usora. The land was initially, as is explicitly claimed in the document, given to the church by Tvrtko's predecessors, that is to say, "the great Prijezda, the former ban, the grandfather of Stjepan the great, our uncle," and the gift was also confirmed by "the great Stjepan, also ban, our dear uncle."[51]

Using this information and combining it with other sources we can summarise the early dynastic history of the Kotromanići by stating that Ban Prijezda played an important political role in Bosnia during Ninoslav's reign, succeeding the ban on the throne after his death in ca. 1250. If we assume that Ban Prijezda was truly a cousin of Ban Ninoslav, and if Ninoslav's ancestors did rule Bosnia from "the old times," then according to all accounts the Kotromanići can be considered a native Bosnian dynasty that could be traced back with an unbroken line from Ban Kulin to Stjepan Tomašević, the last king of Bosnia. This is because Prijezda had at least three sons, of which Stjepan succeeded him around 1287. Even though Ban Stjepan was deposed from power in Bosnia at the beginning of the fourteenth century and replaced by rulers from the Croatian noble kindred of Šubići from Bribir,[52] his son of the same name, Ban Stjepan II, managed to overthrow the Šubići with assistance from the Hungarian king and ruled Bosnia in his own right from 1322.[53] Since he died in 1353 without male heirs, he was succeeded by the son of his brother Vladislav, the fifteen-year-old Tvrtko, who would go on to be crowned as king in 1377.[54]

Due to the peculiar religious circumstances in Bosnia, where the ecclesiastical structures refrained from legalising martyrial sanctity of monarchs, as opposed to the practice in neighbouring Hungary and Serbia where deceased kings were almost routinely canonised,[55] the

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[51] "[…] quamdam possessionem ecclesie sancti Petri in Vsura, nomine Dubimcham, concessam a nostris predecessoribus, scilicet a magno Prezda olim Bano, avo Stephani magni pridem similiter patrui nostri, necnon et confirmatam per eundam Stephanum magnum similiter Banum patruum nostrum carissimum […]". 1 November 1356, Thallóczy, Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter, 332. The Latin superlative *magnus* is apparently used here to denote seniority in rank or age.

[52] Damir Karbić, Šubići Bribirski do gubitka nasljedne banske časti (1322.), *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za društvene i povijesne znanosti HAZU* 22 (2004), 1–26, 16–17; Neven Budak, Paulus de Breberio banus Croatorum dominus et Bosne, in: Donald Ostrowski / Christian Raffensperger (Eds.), Portraits of medieval Eastern Europe, 900–1400. Abingdon, New York 2018, 100–108.

[53] Ferdo Šišić, Pad Mladena Šubića, bana hrvatskoga i bosanskoga. Istorička studija, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 14 (1902), 335–66, 363–66.

[54] Sima Ćirković, Istorija srednjovekovne bosanske države. Beograd 1964, 122.

[55] Gábor Klaniczay, Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses. Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe. Cambridge 2000; Danica Popović, Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji. Beograd 2006; eadem, A National "Pantheon". Saintly Cults at the Foundation of Serbian Medieval State and Church, in: Dragan Vojvodić / Danica Popović (Eds.), Sacral Art of the Serbian Lands in the Middle Ages. Beograd 2016, 119–31; Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, Sveti kralj.

Bosnian rulers had to resort to secular measures in elevating their importance and prestige. In a system where there was no well-defined principle of dynastic succession, especially in the early stages, it became even more essential to develop new legitimation strategies by concentrating on and celebrating the memory of a deceased monarch to enhance the power of the living one. As can be discerned from Ban Tvrtko's 1356 charter, in which he describes the kinship ties of his predecessors, the young ruler was well aware of his illustrious ancestry and understood that his reputation and position on the throne could be additionally strengthened by regularly indicating his belonging to a distinguished line of previous Bosnian rulers.[56] By doing so, he attempted to present his true legitimation as primarily dynastical, whereby the dynasty would be seen as a boundless and infinite "supra-individual entity" free from clerical approval or consecration.[57] In fact, Tvrtko recognised the legalising function of genealogy and the way that he could use it to his advantage in an attempt to mould the perception of the past according to his requirements. After the death of the last Serbian Emperor Uroš in 1371, he made genealogy one of the main pillars of his political programme in staking a claim to the vacant royal throne of Serbia.

It is a well-established opinion in historiography that Ban Tvrtko encouraged, influenced or even commissioned the production of royal genealogies which emphasised his connection to the sacred Nemanjić dynasty of Serbia.[58] This is obvious from the fact that several of the preserved textual accounts of the Nemanjić family tree, at their very end, recount the story of the Serbian King Dragutin (r. 1276–1282) and his descendants. They focus on Dragutin's marriage to Catherine, the daughter of the Hungarian King Stephen V (r. 1270–1272), and

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Kult Stefana Dečanskog. Beograd 2007; IDEM, Patterns of Martyrial Sanctity in the Royal Ideology of Medieval Serbia. Continuity and Change, *Balcanica* 37 (2007), 69–79.

[56] In 1367, Tvrtko issued a charter to Ragusa, confirming the laws and agreements that the Ragusan commune had with his uncle Stjepan II "and with his fathers and forefathers." 1 June 1367, STOJANOVIĆ, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 73.

[57] Ernst H. KANTOROWICZ, The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology. Princeton/NJ, Oxford 1997, 330, 336. See also Thomas DACOSTA KAUFMANN, Toward a Geography of Art. Chicago, London 2004, 137.

[58] Đorđe Sp. RADOJIČIĆ, Doba postanka i razvoj starih srpskih rodoslova, *Istorijski glasnik* 2 (1948), 21–36, 23–27, thought that Tvrtko prompted the creation of written Nemanjić genealogies on the eve of his coronation, but Marija VASILJEVIĆ, Nastanak srpskih rodoslova i letopisa kao posledica političkih i društvenih promena, *Inicijal – Časopis za srednjovekovne studije* 3 (2015), 95–117, 99–101, presents a persuasive case that Tvrtko's line was merely inserted into an already existing genealogy of the Nemanjići. See also Marija VASILJEVIĆ, Genealogije između istorije i ideologije. Primer porekla kneginje Milice, *Istorijski časopis* 65 (2016), 79–99. On medieval genealogical constructs in general: Gert MELVILLE, Zur Technik genealogischer Konstruktionen, in: Cristina ANDENNA / Gert MELVILLE (Eds.), Idoneität – Genealogie – Legitimation. Begründung und Akzeptanz von dynastischer Herrschaft im Mittelalter. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2015, 293–304.

on their daughter Jelisaveta who gave birth to Stjepan, the Bosnian ban, as well as to Ninoslav and Vladislav. Finally, the genealogy then turns to Vladislav's children – Ban Tvrtko and Vukić (Vuk) – clearly suggesting that the preservation and perpetuation of the dynastic line depended on the progeny of King Dragutin.[59]

Searching through his family history for genealogical argumentation, Tvrtko found a connection between the Nemanjić and Kotromanić dynasties in the marriage of King Dragutin's daughter Jelisaveta to Ban Stjepan of Bosnia, concluded sometime in the second half of 1284.[60] This would mean that Jelisaveta was Tvrtko's grandmother and that he was a great-grandson of a Serbian king. Seeing as Dragutin was forced to relinquish his throne to his brother Milutin in 1282, whose direct descendants then ruled Serbia until 1371, and since the dynastic link was traced through the female bloodline, Tvrtko's claim was probably not as strong or straightforward as he would have wanted. But in exceptional circumstances such as this one, boundaries of dynastic legitimation could be stretched, so female descendants were considered as equally important bearers of hereditary validity as the male ones.[61] And however weak, Tvrtko's claim was nevertheless strongest and was backed up by concrete political power. He used genealogy and propaganda to present himself as a rightful heir of a dynasty which was extinct through the male line and to defend his claim on the royal crown. This implied the raising of genealogical consciousness by insisting on predecessors and ancestors; a discourse that became particularly apparent during times of crisis, amid struggles of succession or when the ruler's claim to power was questioned.[62] Thus it became important for Tvrtko to show the imagined unbroken dynastic link in order to justify the peaceful transfer of power and legitimacy, and to ensure institutional continuity which played a key role in the relocation of kingship from Serbia to Bosnia.[63]

Aside from genealogical narratives, which highlighted the critical role that specific ancestors played in the inheritance of rule and transmission of legacy from one generation to the next, the endurance of the dynasty could also be expressed through charters and diplomatic material in general. In fact, charters were by their very nature quite convenient for demonstrating distinguished parentage and as such were one of the most potent ideological weapons in justifying

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[59] Ljubomir Stojanović, Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi. Sr. Karlovci 1927, 38, 50, 198.

[60] Gregor Čremošnik, Kancelariski i notarski spisi 1278–1301. Beograd 1932, 136–7. Cf. Ćirković, Istorija srednjovekovne bosanske države, 75.

[61] Vasiljević, Nastanak srpskih rodoslova i letopisa, 101.

[62] Julian Führer, Gegenwart der Vorgänger und genealogisches Bewusstsein bei den Kapetingern (987–1223), in: Hartwin Brandt / Katrin Köhler / Ulrike Siewert (Eds.), Genealogisches Bewusstsein als Legitimation. Bamberg 2009, 145–66, 158.

[63] On the role that institutional continuity played in the construction of kingship, see Deborah Gerish, Royal Continuity and Identity in the First Kingdom of Jerusalem, in: Christopher Harper-Bill (Ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XX. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1997. Woodbridge 1998, 127–50, 136.

royal power.[64] Therefore, we get the clearest glimpse of Tvrtko's genealogical programme in his great charter issued to Ragusa in 1378, some six months after his coronation when he assumed the title "king of the Serbs, Bosnia and the Maritime parts." In it, he clearly states that the legitimacy for his coronation and the inheritance of the Serbian royal crown is based on genealogical descent from the Nemanjići.[65]

In the charter's extensive *arenga*, or preamble, King Tvrtko talks of the divine grace which granted the "blossoming of an offshoot" which was "nobly rooted" in his kin, thus dignifying him with a "double crown" and allowing him to rule both Bosnia and Serbia.[66] The text of the document was written and composed by a scribe from Serbia and leaned heavily on Serbian diplomatic patterns and influences. Rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty often used biblical terminology and imagery in their charters, such as "roots", "offshoots", "blossom" or "fruit", to describe themselves as descendants of the sacred bloodline. These political, ideological, religious and literary messages that present Stefan Nemanja (r. 1166–1196), the canonised founder of the dynasty, like a root from which his son and the subsequent Nemanjići bloomed, can frequently be found not only in charters but also in paintings, biographies, hagiographic works, liturgical writings, etc.[67]

Drawing on previous Serbian examples, Tvrtko and his scribe introduced a new textual formula which would, with certain adjustments, remain an integral part of the royal charters until the very end of the Bosnian Kingdom. This new model did not only emphasise the duties of the ruler but also dealt with the source of his authority by generally speaking about predecessors in an ideological context.[68] Basing his reign on the premise of inheritance, Tvrtko used the charter to state that God allowed him to rule first and foremost in the "God-given land of Bosnia", and then honoured him to inherit the throne of his ancestors, the lords of Serbia, who, "having ruled in the earthly empire, had passed to the heavenly one". Seeing the

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[64] See Marija Vasiljević, Pomeni predaka u poveljama Nemanjića i legitimizacija vlasti, *Inicijal – Časopis za srednjovekovne studije* 1 (2013), 77–96.

[65] Tvrtko's coronation and its political implications are discussed by Sima Ćirković, The Double Wreath. A Contribution to the History of Kingship in Bosnia, *Balcanica* 45 (2014), 107–43. The article was originally published in Serbian under the title: Sugubi venac (prilog istoriji kraljevstva u Bosni), *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 8 (1964), 343–69. See also Dubravko Lovrenović, Proglašenje Bosne kraljevstvom 1377. (Pokušaj revalorizacije), *Forum Bosnae* 3-4 (1999), 227–87.

[66] 10 April 1378, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 76.

[67] Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, Vladarska ideologija Nemanjića. Beograd 1997, 111–2. See also Dragan Vojvodić, Rodoslovne predstave i ideja praroditeljstva u manastiru Studenici, in: Ljubomir Maksimović / Vladimir Vukašinović (Eds.), Manastir Studenica – 700 godina kraljeve crkve. Beograd 2016, 253–66.

[68] Neven Isailović, Pomeni predaka i srodnika u srednjovekovnim bosanskim poveljama, in: Dani srpskoga duhovnog preobraženja 24. Srednji vek u srpskoj nauci, istoriji, književnosti i umetnosti 8. Despotovac 2017, 103–11, 105.

land of his forebears as it was left behind them, "without its shepherd", Tvrtko went to the Serbian land, wishing and wanting to restore the throne of his ancestors, and was crowned by the God-given crown to the throne of his ancestors.[69]

This dynastic concept was not Tvrtko's invention; he merely modified it and adapted it to suit his needs. Similar ideas regarding royal predecessors are present in the charters of Serbian Kings Milutin (r. 1282–1321) and Stefan of Dečani (r. 1322–1331), both of who emphasised the legitimacy and holiness of the whole dynasty by developing the theme of the sacred root and its offshoots, and by insisting on dynastic topics, such as the "God-given crown", the "ruling genealogy" which serves as a guarantee of continuity of state and dynasty, and the "sacred root" as a source of authority.[70]

In his surviving charters issued to Ragusa, Tvrtko remained faithful to the model and continued to mention his royal "fathers and forefathers", especially when describing the central moment for the legitimation of his authority – his arrival on the throne.[71] He even referred to ancestors on his mother's side while pursuing his dynastic claims in Croatia. Namely, in 1388 King Tvrtko confirmed the privileges that were granted to the town of Klis by his predecessors from the Šubić family, Bans Mladin and Paul, as well as Count George, who was his maternal grandfather.[72] This example portrays the complexity of the marital networks that existed among the noble and ruling houses of Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, as well as the numerous available claims that they made possible. It also shows that Tvrtko was fully aware of his Croatian ancestry and that he used it to political effect, obviously attempting to exploit it in the same way that he succeeded in doing so with the narrative about his descent from the Nemanjići.

The custom of invoking predecessors persisted even after Tvrtko's death and remained a constant feature of the Bosnian royal charters issued to Ragusa. Already in 1399, King Ostoja, who was King Tvrtko's cousin, referred to the "sincere love and faithful service" that Ragusa showed to his "fathers and forefathers."[73] A year later, he claimed that God had made him "successor and lord over the lands of my fathers and forefathers."[74] After Ostoja was ousted

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[69] 10 April 1378, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 76.

[70] Marjanović-Dušanić, Vladarska ideologija Nemanjića, 131, 153.

[71] 12 March 1380, Lajos Thallóczy, Kako i kada je Hrvoje postao veliki vojvoda bosanski?, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 9 (1897), 183–91, 184; 2 December 1382, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 84.

[72] "[…] conservabimus in omnibus ordinationibus, quas dicunt habuisse tempore predecessorum nostrorum dominorum banorum Mladini et Pauli atque comitis Georgii scilicet nobis et nostris heredibus teneantur semper et in perpetuum omagii fidelitatem observare." 22 July 1387, Tadija Smičiklas, Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, Vol. 17: 1386–1394. Zagreb 1981, 73–74.

[73] 15 January 1399, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 421; 5 February 1399, ibidem, 424–5.

[74] 8 December 1400, Stojan Novaković, Povelja kralja Stjepana Ostoje vojvodi Hrvoju i sinu mu Baoši, godine 1400. 8. dekembra, *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 6 (1868), 48–53, 50.

from the throne, his replacement, the young King Tvrtko II restored to Ragusa all the privileges that were made and recorded by his "fathers and forefathers" and were confirmed by all the Bosnian nobles.[75] Ostoja's son, King Stjepan Ostojić (r. 1418–1420), acknowledged a somewhat more specific list of predecessors when he confirmed to Ragusans the charters, liberties, laws, conditions that were made by the "lord King Tvrtko and the father of my kingship, lord Stefan Ostoja, and all the other lords that have ruled before me."[76]

But King Stjepan Ostojić was a victim of the Southeast European political realities of fifteenth-century Bosnia, a state wedged between the interests of the Great Powers of that time – the Ottoman Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom. He was deposed from the throne only two years after coming to power and replaced by the erstwhile King Tvrtko II who sought to fully capitalise on his parentage by summoning the name of his illustrious father, King Tvrtko I. It was he who instigated a significant change in the chancery practice at the very beginning of his second reign. In August of 1421, Tvrtko II introduced the confirmation of the previous privileges and charters of his predecessors to Ragusa with an *arenga* that was completely different from any of the preceding ones:

> The Lord looks down from heaven, he sees all the children of man and listens to the voice of all those who trust in He who holds all the means through which kings reign and tyrants hold the land. The one God Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today, and to the ages, chose our fathers and forefathers and glorified them more than any other kings on Earth and the Heavens by adorning them with shining crowns beside all the saints, making their blessed memory known to the entire Universe. From their kin, I have been chosen by the will of God and his immaculate mother and their prayers to be Stefan Tvrtko Tvrtković, by the grace of God king of Bosnia and more. Not straying from their path as the great-grandson, grandson, son and rightful heir of their holy roots, by the will and judgement of God I have accepted the realm of the Kingdom and sat on the throne of the Kingdom as the king and ruler of the whole state of my holy forebears, accepting honours and glory and many gifts from all […].[77]

This exceptional text, which was repeated only once more in a preserved charter of King Tomaš,[78] was created in different political circumstances, after the old chancery models from the time of King Tvrtko I stopped being significant, and when the motif of the holy roots had to be additionally elaborated.[79] It concentrates on the sacred ancestors of King Tvrtko II (1380–1443) and presents him as their faithful descendant, emphasising that he was the

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[75] 24 June 1405, Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 1, 490.

[76] 5 March 1419, ibidem, 554–5.

[77] 18 August 1421, ibidem, 504–5.

[78] 3 September 1444, Ljubomir Stojanović, Stare srpske povelje i pisma, Vol. 2. Beograd, Sr. Karlovci 1934, 115–6.

[79] Isailović, Pomeni predaka i srodnika u srednjovekovnim bosanskim poveljama, 106.

great-grandson and *grandson* of the previous Bosnian and Serbian rulers. This might have been a slight taunt directed towards the deposed King Stjepan Ostojić who could probably not make the same claim. And since the Bosnian Church had a profound influence on the ruling ideology of Bosnian kings,[80] this is as far as Tvrtko II could have taken things in an attempt to extend his line by converting it into a narrow oriented dynastic structure based on the Nemanjić models inherited from Serbia, where dynastic sanctity was one of the basic tenets of legitimating authority.[81]

One other important aspect of the new *arenga* was the conspicuous omission of Serbia from the whole narrative. This was a reluctant distancing from the ambitious programme formulated in the time of King Tvrtko I, but it was also a public acceptance of the reality that Bosnia and Serbia essentially represented two unattached political entities. So, despite keeping Serbia in the royal title and sporadically mentioning it in official correspondence, rulers after Tvrtko II were only ever perceived as kings of Bosnia. This adjustment required a re-examining of the ideological basis on which the Bosnian Kingdom was founded, and the Bosnian kings had to conform to the change. It became clear after the battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the death of King Tvrtko I two years later that Bosnia and Serbia had separate political paths. So the rulers of Bosnia found it necessary to go beyond the model of the sacred family that was inherited from the Nemanjići, and present the Kotromanići as a dynasty in their own right. They did this by presenting themselves as an ancestor focused kindred and by placing a particular emphasis on their glorious history.

Inventing Ancestors? Crafting the Kotromanić Origin Story

By its very nature, the patrilineal family traces its descent through the male line back to a founder.[82] Depending on the preservation of memory this forefather might have been either real or fictional, and his descendants would then construct appropriate narratives through which family members could cultivate a sense of solidarity and display pride in their ancestry. These "origin stories" or "myths of origins" were perceived as clean slates onto which an idealised version of the past could be inscribed, providing the family with an opportunity to display their superiority in comparison to other potential rival families and to assert their place in the political life of the state. Because of their effectiveness, such elaborate tales became an essential part of the dynasty's legitimising strategy, sanctioning the moral authority and validating the

[80] Dubravko Lovrenović, Bosansko srednjovjekovlje u svjetlu kristijanizacije vladarske ideologije, *Bosna franciscana* 8 (1997), 156–93.

[81] Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, Dinastija i svetost u doba porodice Lazarević: stari uzori i novi modeli, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 43 (2006), 77–95.

[82] David Herlihy, Medieval Households. Cambridge, London 1985, 82–83.

reign of the ruler in the eyes of his subjects.[83] Considering that a monarch usually arrived at power under hereditary right which passed from his forebears, a sovereign's claim to rule was based on the prerogative of his ancestors and was commonly justified as a result of divine agency. If it became accepted that he originated from an esteemed individual whose descendants held power for a long, unspecified amount of time, this could immensely enhance the status of the current ruler and additionally secure his position on the throne.[84] Therefore, it was not crucially important whether the origins of the Kotromanić dynasty were fictitious or factual, and whether they truly were "segnori ab antiquo", but that their subjects believed them to be, accepting them as the established and traditional rulers of Bosnia since ancient times. This impression was achieved through diverse kinds of visual and textual representations, and it seems that the dynasty's history occupied a significant position in this extensive propaganda campaign.

Unfortunately, what the dynasty members knew about their own past cannot be fully reassembled on the basis of several references to history that are preserved in existing sources. Their understanding of their origins must have been much more complex and intricate than can be distinguished from the surviving material. In fact, we can presume the existence of various genealogies, stories and chronicles, all of which might have been lost in the whirlwind of the Ottoman conquest and the subsequent centuries, and which served to establish the "ideological" basis of the ruling family's dynastic self-consciousness. Therefore, to comprehend how the Kotromanići constructed their self-image, we have to rely on a few glimpses of historical knowledge communicated in documents stemming from outside of their inner circle.

Namely, by the third decade of the fifteenth century, Ragusans nurtured a tradition about the Bosnian royal family in which the central role was assumed by the story of lady Jelisaveta, the widow of Ban Stjepan I. She found refuge in Ragusa during the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Wishing to express the customary devotion of Ragusa to the Bosnian nobility, on 19 February 1423, the Ragusan government instructed its messengers, Nicholas de Goze and Blaise de Georgio, who were residing at the court of Voivode Sandalj Hranić, telling the powerful lord about the destiny of Jelisaveta, the mother of Ban Stjepan II. According to the

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[83] See, for example, Colin Imber, The Ottoman Dynastic Myth, *Turcica* 19 (1987), 7–27; Dániel Bagi, Genealogische Fälschungen und Fiktionen als Legitimierungsmittel in narrativen Quellen des östlichen Europas im 11.–13. Jahrhundert, in: Erik Kooper / Sjoerd Levelt (Eds.), The Medieval Chronicle VIII. Amsterdam, New York 2013, 75–92. For an analysis of how political elites in late medieval Croatia used origin myths to construct their dynastic identities, see Luka Špoljarić, Illyrian Trojans in a Turkish Storm. Croatian Renaissance Lords and the Politics of Dynastic Origin Myths, in: Patrick Baker / Ronny Kaiser / Maike Priesterjahn / Johannes Helmrath (Eds.), Portraying the Prince in the Renaissance. The Humanist Depiction of Rulers in Historiographical and Biographical Texts. Berlin, Boston/MA 2016, 121–56.

[84] Hakan T. Karateke, Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate. A Framework for Historical Analysis, in: Hakan T. Karateke / Maurus Reinkowski (Eds.), Legitimizing the Order. The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power. Leiden 2005, 13–52, 19–20.

narrative, she and her children were expelled from Bosnia after her husband died. Being left without any hope, she found shelter and protection in Ragusa where she was well received even though she had been deprived of her fortresses, villages, vassals or riches. When the troubles in Bosnia finally settled down, Jelisaveta returned to her dominion which from then on remained in possession of the Kotromanići, her descendants.[85]

The same story can also be encountered in the instructions for Johannes de Gondola and Nicholas de Georgio, Ragusan envoys sent to the king of Bosnia on 14 May 1432. Intending to evoke the good friendship which existed between the rulers of Bosnia and Ragusa from the oldest of times, the emissaries were supposed to tell the king what happened when the husband of the "good Elisalda" passed away, leaving her in Bosnia with three little sons, Ban Stjepan, Knez Vladislav, "the grandfather of Your majesty", and Knez Ninoslav. Not seeing where else she could hide with her sons apart from in Ragusa, "which was a proper house of the Bosnian rulers", she remained there with great honour bestowed upon her until she returned to her land.[86]

The described course of events and the stay of the Bosnian exiles in Ragusa after their enemies forced them out of the country is confirmed by some other sources,[87] but the whole

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[85] "Elisauta, madre del bano Stefano, coli suoi figluoli dischiaziata dali suoi inimici della signoria da Bosna, non abiando altrove magiore ne parva ferma sperancia di refugio che in la cita da Ragusa si ridusse de qua da noi et non le valse alcuna sua forteze, o vilagii, o vassali, o richeze, la quale siando ben veduta et recevuta et com fatiche et spese, seguando acordio colli suo inimici di Bossna, sene ritorno in la sua signoria, la quale in fin questo di se e rimasa in la casa delli Cotromanich, suo descendenti." 19 February 1423, DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 8, fol. 146v. Cf. Nicolai Iorga, Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XV^{e} siècle, Vol. 2. Paris 1899, 212. See also Vladimir Ćorović, Historija Bosne. Prva knjiga. Beograd 1940, 612.

[86] "Di puo siando morto la Ban, marito della bona Elisalda, vedandosi essa rimasa in Bosna com tre fioleti pizoli, zoe Ban Steffano, lo conte Vladissauo, auo della maesta vostra, e lo conte Ninossauo. Non vedando dove altro meglio se con li suo fioleti conservare se potessi cha a Ragusi laqual era casa propria di reali del Bosna e sempre stata conzonta com essi reali de cordial amore et carita in essa come in casa sua propria se reduxe dove stagnando finalmente com li modi favore et destri cheli diedi e sapi tenir Ragusa ritorno nello regnamo de Bosna dove forse se altrove che a Ragusi si fosse reduta non serave cusi legieremo te ritornata in esso regno. Nel qual siando et stagando, contumando lo bon amore in Ragusi. E non siando essa nelli suo fioli ingrata del beneficio receputo quanto sapi a potete beneficio et remerito in ben et honore Ragusi, digando expressamente malidicium a zachuno fosse et facesse contra Ragusi. Et benedicion a qualuncha volesse et facesse lo honore et bene di quella." 14 May 1432, DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 11, fol. 91r–91v. Cf. Iorga, Notes et extraits, Vol. 2, 307; Ćorović, Historija Bosne, 612.

[87] A decision of the Ragusan Great council from 6 April 1314 concerns expenses that the commune should incur for the arrival and lodging of the "ban." Monumenta Ragusina. Libri reformationum, Vol. 1. Zagrabiae 1879, 41. Cf. Sima Ćirković, Komentari i izvori Mavra Orbina, in: Mavro Orbin, Kraljevstvo Slovena. Beograd 1968, 291–428, 341. It is not, however, completely clear who this individual

story is presented from a distinctly Ragusan perspective. The referencing of these accounts was supposed to advance Ragusan political and economic interests by focusing on the services performed to the members of the Kotromanić family in times of their suffering. The stories were intended to persuade the grateful king to reciprocate and return the favour. However, this does not mean that they were not true, at least in their essence, but that the Ragusans opted to present those narratives that were most appropriate for their current needs.[88] This should be taken into consideration while analysing the other historical account that was included in the Ragusan instruction from 1432. Namely, in the same directive, there is one more crucial piece of information on the origin of the Kotromanići, chronologically situated before the death of Jelisaveta's husband and her stay in Ragusa with children.

The legates were commanded to remind the king of the "ancient, great, long and cordial love, and true zeal of charity, friendship and goodwill" that the Ragusans always maintained with the Bosnian ruling house, "as it was the natural instinct ordered by God, the heavens and the heavenly constellations." The rulers of Bosnia "with perfection, ardour of good heart and will" were as one with Ragusa, and they always preserved and defended its honour, increasing its many benefits, as to their own house, from which they had a great reputation and respect. Such relations, the messengers were supposed to state, were sustained ever since the time of *Cotrumano Gotto*, from whom stems the origin and the beginning of Bosnian rulers. According to their testimony, he entered Bosnia from Hungary with the help of the Hungarian king, his cousin, and the Ragusans honoured him well, showing him so much love and joy that he did not want to give privileges to anyone else but Ragusa, his own house, which he firmly upheld and respected. This unity of love and goodwill with Ragusa was followed and maintained by generations of following rulers.[89]

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was, since the title of the ban of Bosnia at that time was held by Mladin II Šubić. At the same time, Ragusans might also have been referring to either Stjepan I, the previous ban, or to his son Stjepan II.

[88] Ragusans often referred to past events in their official decrees and correspondence, presenting wise customs and deeds of the ancestors as models for present action. For more on the way that the past was used to construct identity in the renaissance community of Ragusa, see Lovro Kunčević, Mit o Dubrovniku. Diskursi o identitetu renesansnoga grada. Zagreb, Dubrovnik 2015.

[89] "Et prima voliamo dobiate andare alla presentia del Re et per parte nostra dirli in questa forma: 'Serenissimo Re, la signoria nostra considerando lo antiquissimo, grande, longo e cordiale amore, et lo intrinsico zelo de carita, amicicia et dileccion, li quali anno sempre avuto et portato a Ragusa, quasi per instincto naturale e colne cosa che cosi abia voluto et ordinate esso I dio, I celi, et constelacion superne. Li reali signori de Bosna e di quali com perfection et ardore di bono core e volunta sono stati conzonti con Ragusa per molti modi et manere sostegnando et deffendando lo honore et bene dessa, et augmentandola de molti benefici e destri come casa sua propria, dilaqual sempre se ne anno fatto grandissima stima e reputacion, come prima fo voliando cominzare a narare Cotrumano Gotto, dal qual a avuto origine e principio li reali de Bosna, il qual venuto de Hungaria, et intrato in Bosna cum lo ajuto et brazo del re de Hungaria, suo parente, stando ben veduto, honorato et cortizado da Ragusi. Ad essa pose et prese

This extraordinary tale is only preserved in one surviving medieval source, but it obviously represented something that was common knowledge at the time. Seeing as the Ragusan messengers were supposed to present the account to King Tvrtko II, we can conclude that he must have been well aware of the story's contents and significance. It is difficult to believe that the envoys could spin such a great yarn in front of the king, and it seems that the tale, despite coming down to us in its Ragusan form, did not actually originate from Ragusa but was probably conceived at the Bosnian royal court.

The same account, with some differences, was also included in the seminal work "Il regno degli Slavi" composed by the Ragusan Benedictine monk Mauro Orbini and published in Pesaro in 1601. He places the time of the story in the early thirteenth century, after the reign of Ban Kulin, and interprets Cotroman's epithet *Gotto* as *Tedesco*, identifying him as a German, claiming that he found no other thing written about the Kotromanići, "che regnarono anticamente in Bosna."[90] Some early twentieth-century historians disputed the whole story and renounced it as Orbini's fabrication,[91] but investigations in the Ragusan archives and the discovery of the cited letter proved without a doubt that the narrative was known in the Middle Ages.[92] Sima

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tanto amore et dilection che tutto lo suo studio mai ad altro non fo noma a volere, cercare e fare quello fosse in beneficia destro et conservacion dessa come di casa sua propria, laqual fermamente tegneua et reputaua, et cusi successivamente in piu et piu generacion fo seguita et contumata per li altri seguenti reali, essa unita di bon amore e dilection con Ragusi." 14 May 1432, DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 11, fol. 91r–91v. Cf. Iorga, Notes et extraits, Vol. 2, 307.

[90] "Ora morto che fù questo Culino Bano, il Rè, che à quel tempo si trouaua in Vngaria, per le ragioni già dette, si risolse far conquista del Regno di Bosna. Il perche mandò con l'essercito vno de suoi Baroni addimandato Cotromanno Tedesco, huomo famoso nell' armi. Il quale venendo in Bosna, e trouato la senza Signore, l'occupò facilmente. Onde il Rè, per rimunerarlo di questo, lo fece Bano di Bosna; & vol le che etiandio i suoi posteri perpetuassero in quel dominio. I quali sendo con processo di tempo in gran numero multiplicati, chia maronsi tutti col nome della famiglia Cotromanni. Et quasi sempre era in casa loro il dominio di Bosna: facédosi alcuna volta chia mare col nome de' Bani, e tal'hora con quello de' Conti. Nel gouerno de' quali erea questo di buono, che mantenauano in Bosna la libertà, có le vsanze antiche. Imperoche sendo questo Regno all'hora pieno di molti Signori nobilissimi, questi nó permetteuano ad alcuno di quelli, ch'erano nel dominio, di vsar tirannide à niuno; & voleuano che ciascuno fusse mantenuto nello stato, & patrimonio suo. Nè altra cosa trouo scritta di questi Cotromanni, che regnarono anticamente in Bosna, fino ch'il dominio peruenne in mano di Stefano Bano di questa casa. Il quale gouernaua la Bosna nel modo sopradetto, & era da bene, & faggio Principe. Ma morto che fù egli l'anno 1310. lasciò tre figliuoli, Stefano, Ninoslau, & Vuladislau; de' quali qui appresso diremo il successo: auertendo prima il lettore, ch'il confine frà Bosna, & Rassia è il fiume Drina." Mauro Orbini, Il regno degli Slavi. Pesaro 1601, 350–1.

[91] Thallóczy, Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter, 66–75.

[92] Vladimir Ćorović, Pitanje o poreklu Kotromanića, *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 5 (1925), 15–20.

Ćirković believed that both versions of the story, the one in the instruction and the one conveyed by Orbini, stemmed from a hypothetical "History of the Kotromanić dynasty" which might have existed in the early fifteenth century, but was then lost later on.[93] It is, however, more likely that Orbini sourced this storyline directly from the Ragusan archives because it is quite clear that he had access to archival documents. This is also evident from the works of some other early modern Ragusan chroniclers, such as Junius Resti, who made extensive use of the archives, both in the case of the story of lady Jelisaveta,[94] and *Cotromano Gotto*,[95] that are copied almost verbatim from the preserved instructions. The only other significant Ragusan writer who mentions *Cotroman* in any capacity is Jacopo Luccari. In his work published in 1605, he states that "Cotroman the German" built the castle of Vrhbosna, later Sarajevo, on the slopes of the mount Jakotina in 1270.[96] This outlandish claim has no basis in real events and cannot be substantiated with historical documents. It only adds to the chronological confusion and complicates the quest for the identity of the dynasty's founder.

It should be noted that upon careful inspection, contrary to the interpretation of some early modern Ragusan chroniclers and some historians from later times,[97] the original source does not claim that this *Cotroman* was identical to Ban Stjepan I, the husband of "good Elisalda", but locates the story in some unspecified and vague time in the past. Mauro Orbini states

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[93] Ćirković, Komentari i izvori Mavra Orbina, 427.

[94] "Era intanto morto Stefano Cotromano, bano di Bossina, ed aveva lasciato Elisalda sua moglie con tre figlioli, Stefano il primogenito, Ninoslavo e Vladislavo, li quali dovendo succeder al morto lor padre, dalli Bossinesi non furono ammessi, poiche tutti li primi baroni di quel regno contro di loro si mossero. Il che vedendo Elisalda, e considerata la minorita de' figlioli, ne vedendo dove meglio si poteva conservare, si ricover a Ragusa, sicura della cordial benevolenza sempre stata fra il suo marito e questa repubblica." Chronica Ragusina Junii Restii. Zagrabiae 1893, 106.

[95] "Ma essi, sbrigatisi con corrispondenti cerimonie, si portarono dal re, al quale esposero la grande amicizia, stata non solo tra il suo padre, ma anche tra tutta la casa Cotromana e tra la repubblica, da che Cotromano Gotto per il suo valore conquisto la Bossina; in corrispondenza del che la repubblica con tanto affetto aver ricevuto nel suo stato Elisalda, sua bisavola, la quale nell' universale sollevazione contro d'essa, fatta nel regno, ivi s'era rifugiata con li figlioli, dal qual tempo quella regia stirpe per natural instituto s'era mantenuta in continua confederazione con la repubblica, avendola soccorsa in piu occasioni e di truppe e di consiglio, e d'altre assistenze, secondo richiesero i tempi […]." Ibidem, 258.

[96] "Alle falde di questo monte Cotroman Tedesco edificò nel 1270. il Castello di Varch Bosna, da cui crebbe la Città di Saraio […]." Giacomo di Pietro Luccari, Copioso ristreto de gli Annali di Rausa. Venetia 1605, 16–17. See also Vladimir Mažuranić, Izvori dubrovačkoga historika Jakova Lukarevića, *Narodna starina* 3 (1924), 121–53.

[97] For instance: "Mori appresso Stefano Cotroman, Conte di Bosna […]." Luccari, Copioso ristreto de gli Annali di Rausa, 45. Cf. Ćiro Truhelka, Kolijevka i groblje prvih Kotromanića, *Nastavni vjesnik* 41 (1932/1933), 189–201.

that *Cotroman* conquered Bosnia in the first decades of the thirteenth century, but this would then contradict Ban Ninoslav's claims that his ancestors ruled the land "from ancient times." In fact, when the documented and proven history of Bosnia is examined in close detail, it is hard to believe that such a massive occurrence – a conquest of Bosnia either in the twelfth or thirteenth century – could happen and not leave any traces in trustworthy and contemporary sources. It is also challenging to situate this hypothetical event in any of the source gaps which exist in the earlier periods of Bosnian history. Perhaps, the only time when this might have happened was either before the reign of Ban Kulin or immediately after his death. But the Bosnian rulers and nobility remembered Kulin fondly in 1406 when they sent an embassy to Naples seeking confirmation for the borders of the Bosnian Kingdom as they were during his reign.[98] Even though the territory of Bosnia was much larger in their time, and the borders possibly much more extensive, this case shows that the fifteenth-century Bosnian political elite was well aware of past events, even exploiting them for political gain. Admittedly, the document does not state that Kulin was a member of the same lineage as the established rulers from the Kotromanić dynasty, but the fact that they maintained his memory and alluded to him more than two hundred years after his death certainly indicates an absence of a sharp political break with his reign.

The issue of the Kotromanić origins, especially viewed through the prism of this conquest narrative and the identity of *Cotroman*, intrigued numerous researchers. They attempted to solve the mystery by looking for useful data in the times before the reign of Ban Kulin. All things considered, their solutions can be narrowed down to two main assumptions. The first of them presumes that the eponymous founder of the Kotromanići could have been a certain Hungarian nobleman named *Cotroman*, mentioned among the witnesses in a charter issued by King Stephen III of Hungary in 1163.[99] It is supposed that he could have assumed power in Bosnia in the context of the political upheavals in the relations between Byzantium and Hungary in the second half of the twelfth century.[100]

The second conjecture hangs onto *Cotroman's* epithet "Gotto", mentioned in the document from 1432, or "Tedesco", as was interpreted by Orbini, and seeks for his origins in

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[98] Ioannes Lucius, De Regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae libri sex. Amsterdam 1666, 261–2. See also: Pejo Ćošković, Bosna na prijelomu stoljeća i potvrda državnih granica 1406, *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju* 31 (2002), 57–82.

[99] "[…] in presentia comitum: Martini Spalatensis et Gregorii Sclouinie filii, et Cotromani […]." Tadija Smičiklas, Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, Vol. 2: 1101–1220. Zagreb 1904, 97.

[100] On these conflicts see Ferenc Makk, The Árpáds and the Comneni. Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th century. Budapest 1989; Jadran Ferluga, Vizantijske vojne operacije protiv Ugarske u toku 1166. godine, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 19 (1980), 157–65; Ivo Goldstein, Bizantska vlast u Dalmaciji od 1165. do 1180. godine, *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 30 (1997), 9–28, 18.

Germany.[101] Certain historians suggested that the possible solution to this problem might be found in the action of the German knight Gottfried of Meißen who attacked the Byzantine duke of Bosnia during the reign of Hungarian King Stephen III.[102] While the source explicitly claims that Gottfried returned to Hungary victorious, this circumstance could be bypassed with a far-fetched theory that the honour of ruling Bosnia was given to one of his soldiers who remained in the conquered land.[103]

Rather than focusing on events from the mid-twelfth century, in the pursuit for the origins of the Bosnian royal family one other assumption turns to evidence from the reign of Ban Prijezda. Namely, considering the location of his properties in Slavonia, Ćiro Truhelka posited the ancestral lands of the Kotromanići between Požega and Miholjac on the River Drava. Connecting *Cotroman's* appellation *Gotto* with the name of the Cistercian abbey of St. Mary in Kutjevo, which was frequently mentioned in sources as "de Gotto", Truhelka even precisely specified that the Kotromanići could have stemmed from this Slavonian place.[104]

But is looking for the historical *Cotroman* in preserved sources futile? Historiography and publicist writings are full of theories which cannot be confirmed and which will remain in the domain of assumptions until some new concrete evidence is discovered. *Cotroman* was not such an uncommon name in the Middle Ages, and the surname Kotromanić was also not unique. For instance, during the fourth decade of the fifteenth century, the Ragusan archival

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[101] It is unclear whether the surname (?) *Gotto* implies *Cotroman's* German, i.e. Gothic heritage, as it was interpreted by early modern authors, or whether it was a consequence of a broader tendency in humanist historiography to label and present the early history of Slavs through Gothic terminology. For more on this, see Iva Kurelac, Oblici humanističke i ranonovovjekovne historiografske metodologije rada na srednjovjekovnim izvorima: Primjer djela Historia Salonitana, *Colloquia Maruliana* 21 (2012), 89–107. See also Ferdo Šišić, Letopis popa Dukljanina. Beograd, Zagreb 1928, 110–21.

[102] "Temporibus insuper Stephani regis tertii introivit in Hungariam quidam miles Gotfridus nominatus de Mesnensi regione, a quo egreditur generatio Philippi, Ladislai et Gregorii [SRH, 192] filiorum Kelad. Hic namque Gotfridus cum esset ingenuus, filius scilicet comitis Hersfeldensis in curia Francuurtensi, ubi caesar eligi debuit, seditione commota lancgravium de Turingia dicitur occidisse, et inde per fugam evadens ad regem Stephanum pervenit fugitivus, a quo etiam repetitur per suos inimicos. Cumque rex Stephanus inimicis suis ipsum non traderet, in Alamannia contra eum proscriptionis sententia promulgatur, et sic remanet invitus in Hungaria. Quem quidem postmodum adversus ducem de Bozna cum exercitu rex transmittit, quo devicto ad regem reversus cum favore de caetero pertractatur." Simon of Kéza, The Deeds of the Hungarians. Trans. László Veszprémy. Budapest 1999, 172, 174.

[103] Ćorović, Pitanje o poreklu Kotromanića, 19.

[104] Truhelka, Kolijevka i groblje prvih Kotromanića, 194. On the history of the Cistercian abbey in Kutjevo, see Milan Turković, Prošlost opatije B. Dj. Marije Vallis Honesta de Gotho seu Kuttyeva 1232–1773. Sušak 1935; Ivan Ostojić, Benediktinci u Hrvatskoj i ostalim našim krajevima, Vol. 3. Split 1965, 231–34.

registers mention a certain Radosav Kotromanić, a former servant of the noble Marin de Gozze,[105] and in the Venetian archives in 1439 the name of Ivaniš Kotromanić from Vrana in Dalmatia was recorded.[106] According to the context that both were mentioned in, it is very difficult to connect them to the Bosnian ruling dynasty of the same name.

Even though it is not excluded that the original narrative has a grain of truth contained in its core, it is much more probable that the story of "Cotrumanno Gotto" represents a typical founding legend which was often nurtured in certain families, and mostly in ruling dynasties. These stories intended to bridge the difference between the present and the ancient times of which no data had survived. In such accounts, the central role was played by semi-mythical founders who were ascribed unusual attributes. Apart from legitimising the ruling dynasty, the purpose of these tales was also to give it an aura of inaccessibility, remoteness and separation from its surroundings.

The whole description of *Cotroman's* conquest of Bosnia sounds like a misty reminiscence from a mythical past and a prime example of *Stammesbildung*, which was essential for the long-term existence of the dynasty and which typically included legends relating to earlier stages of its existence.[107] In societies which depended on history in order to legitimate actions in the present, these orally transmitted genealogical traditions became a potentially very effective and invaluable ideological tool which could be cited and manipulated for political effect. Therefore, the interpretation of previous events did not primarily represent a historical record but was employed as a political instrument which could be used as long as the version of the constructed past was plausible.[108] As a basis of royal propaganda, such princely genealogies focused primarily on the "founding father", and their purpose was to provide a specific individual with a succession of renowned and prestigious ancestors.[109] In the early Middle Ages, for example among the Anglo Saxons, a descent of royal dynasties was described as stemming from gods.[110] Such myths persisted even in later times so that the royal dynasty of France, the Capetians, traced

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[105] "Radosavus Cotromanich, famulus olim s. Marin de Goze," Andrija Veselinović, Dubrovačko Malo veće o Srbiji (1415–1460). Beograd 1997, 313, 344, 348, 394.

[106] "Iuanus Cotromanich de Laurana", 5 January 1439, Ljubić, Listine, Vol. 9, 113.

[107] Reinhard Wenskus, Stammesbildung und -verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes. Köln, Graz 1961.

[108] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, Political Utility in Medieval Historiography. A Sketch, *History and Theory* 14 (1975), 314–25.

[109] Godfried Croenen, Princely and Noble Genealogies, Twelfth to Fourteenth Century. Form and Function, in: Erik Kooper (Ed.), The Medieval Chronicle. Amsterdam, Atlanta/GA 1999, 84–95, 85.

[110] Herman Moisl, Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies and Germanic Oral Tradition, *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 215–48. See also idem, Kingship and Orally transmitted Stammestradition among the Lombards and Franks, in: Herwig Wolfram / Andreas Schwarcz (Eds.), Die Bayern und ihre Nachbarn, Part 1. Wien 1985, 111–19, 111.

their origins back to the legendary Trojans,[111] while rulers of medieval Bohemia claimed descent from Biblical patriarchs.[112] Narratives of this kind were indispensable for the preservation, or rather the construction of any kind of dynastic memory and individuality.[113] Through selective remembrance and by deriving the family origins from legendary and mythical ancestors, these ritualised discourses and exchanges did not only serve to enhance the reputation of a reigning dynast or to affirm the legality of his rule, but they were also a veritable source of pride and identity for the members of the broader kindred.

Taking into consideration that by the fifteenth century the Kotromanići split into many distinct branches unquestionably descending from one biological ancestor, their shared beliefs about a common past had to be constructed on collective memory, oral traditions, history, genealogy and patrimony. These, in turn, could then be used as a tool for unification and creation of a specific dynastic identity. And because so much had been forgotten and so little was actually known about it, the earliest history of Bosnia could become susceptible to legend and fiction, through which some stories could be fabricated or certain events embellished beyond recognition.[114] It is precisely through these kinds of tales and sagas, which did not necessarily completely correspond to historical reality, that the dynasty's sense of history and purpose was developed. Therefore, a real or fictional ancestor in the figure of *Cotroman* might have been chosen for unification purposes, to create a common starting point for all members of the

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[111] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative, *History and Theory* 22 (1983), 43–53, 49. Pseudohistorical origin narratives were not restricted only to dynasties, but also applied to peoples, kingdoms, cities, and other kinds of communities. See Susan Reynolds, Medieval *origines gentium* and the Community of the Realm, *History* 68 (1984), 375–90; Peter Hoppenbrouwers, Such Stuff as Peoples are Made on. Ethnogenesis and the Construction of Nationhood in Medieval Europe, *The Medieval History Journal* 9 (2006), 195–242; Bernd Schneidmüller, Constructing the Past by Means of the Present. Historiographical Foundations of Medieval Institutions, Dynasties, Peoples, and Communities, in: Gerd Althoff / Johannes Fried / Patrick J. Geary (Eds.), Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography. Cambridge 2002, 167–92.

[112] Marie Bláhová, The Genealogy of the Czech Luxembourgs in Contemporary Historiography and Political Propaganda, in: Erik Kooper / Sjoerd Levelt (Eds.), The Medieval Chronicle IX. Amsterdam, New York 2014, 1–32.

[113] See Liesbeth Geevers / Mirella Marini, Aristocracy, Dynasty and Identity in Early Modern Europe, 1520–1700, in: Liesbeth Geevers / Mirella Marini (Eds.), Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe. Rulers, Aristocrats and the Formation of Identities. London, New York 2016, 1–22.

[114] A prime example is the image of Bosnia presented in the notorious "Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea" which continues to confuse and perplex researchers to the present day. On the basis of the information given in the text all kinds of possible narratives can be constructed regarding the early history of the Balkans. See the most recent critical edition of the text: Gesta Regum Sclavorum, Vol. 1, trans. Dragana Kunčer, ed. Tibor Živković. Beograd 2009; and the many fantastic theories that can be derived from it in: Muhamed Hadžijahić, Povijest Bosne u IX i X stoljeću. Sarajevo 2004.

kindred and to solve the issue of kinship among them. The story also enhanced the historical significance of the family and explained at the same time how it arrived at the exalted position that it held in the present.

In the Middle Ages, ancient lineage and noble blood were much more important than wealth and property.[115] And since nobility could only truly be achieved through heroic deeds on the field of battle, it became important for nobles as members of the warrior elite to present themselves as inheritors of the courage and bravery of their valiant ancestor.[116] It is because of this that individuals adapted their family history to suit their current needs or to support their political and social ambitions by emphasising the achievements of the dynasty in an improved version of the past. Thus it becomes difficult to distinguish how much of the story of *Cotrumanno Gotto* was a codification of the family's distorted memory, and how much of it was ideology. In that sense, the story could be considered a fabricated family legend which included a distant, perhaps even a fictive ancestor. Still, it could also be a hazy recollection of real events from the eleventh or twelfth century.

Because of the very nature of the sources at our disposal, it is quite a challenge for the modern historian to find any evidence to support the claims of the Kotromanić origin narrative and to isolate the historical truth within it. It seems clear, though, that the story performed a certain function, and its very appearance was obviously politically motivated. Therefore, a straightforward literal reading of the account would prevent us from being able to understand its deeper allegorical meaning and importance for contemporaries who accepted it as reality and did not question the validity of the whole story. Rather than taking it at face value, the narrative should be interpreted as a statement of how the Kotromanići wanted to be perceived.[117] It deals with the immensely important topics of memory and identity, underpins and regulates a specific political system in the state and shows, above all, that the dynasty presented itself as such. The heroic account of their conquering ancestor determined their identity and provided them with a defined place in the broader context of Bosnian history.

Seeing as *Cotroman* was described as a cousin of the Hungarian king, the story might have been an attempt to express superiority through association with the rulers of the much more powerful Kingdom that exerted a great deal of political and cultural influence on Bosnia. It also might have been an explanation of the complex relations between the two countries and their often-clashing political agendas. On the other hand, the Kotromanić dynasty was truly related to the Árpáds, and through them with the Angevin kings of Hungary.[118] When

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[115] Fügedi, The Elefanthy, 40.

[116] Ibidem, 33–34.

[117] The importance of studying perceived origins is stressed by Eviatar Zerubavel, In the Beginning. Notes on the Social Construction of Historical Discontinuity, *Sociological Inquiry* 63 (1993), 457–59.

[118] On one occasion, King Louis of Hungary refers to Bosnian Ban Stjepan II as "our beloved cousin," 1 August 1345, Tadija Smičiklas, Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, Vol. 9: 1321–1331. Zagreb 1911, 221.

Elizabeth, the daughter of Ban Stjepan II, married King Louis the Great of Anjou in 1353, a papal dispensation was needed because they were cousins, sharing the same great-grandfather, Stephen V King of Hungary (r. 1270–1272).[119]

Although we cannot confirm that the Bosnian royal family ever used this tale as public propaganda, it can nevertheless be said that it must have been commonly known at that time. Proud members of the ruling kindred might have used it to remind themselves of their elevated status and to uphold their dynastic identity. The story could also have illustrated the dynasty's honourable origins and noble heritage in marriage negotiations with prominent families from the immediate surroundings. Apart from links with the Angevins from Hungary and Nemanjići from Serbia, that have already been discussed, the Kotromanići were also interconnected with the Šubići from Croatia,[120] somewhat later with the Brankovići from Serbia,[121] and the marital relations were also achieved with the far-away imperial, royal and princely dynasties of Shishman from Bulgaria,[122] Piast from Poland,[123] Ortenburg from Carinthia,[124] Cilli

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[119] Elisabeth and Louis were also related through their mothers: "Significant sanctitati vestre devoti filii Ludovicus rex Ungarie et Elizabet, nata nobilis viri domini Stephani ducis Boznensis, quod ipsi rex et Elizabeth ex certis causis sanctitati vestre exponendis scientes se quarto consanguinitatis gradu ex utroque parente fore coniunctos, matrimonium inuicem contrauerunt carnali inter eos copula subsecuta." 31 August 1353, Tadija Smičiklas, Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, Vol. 12: 1351–1359. Zagreb 1914, 194. See also The Annals of Jan Długosz, trans. Maurice Michael. Charlton 1997, 303.

[120] Marko Perojević, Ženidba Vladislava Kotromanića s Jelenom Šubićevom. Srodstvo Anžuvinaca, Šubića Bribirskih i Kotromanića, *Jugoslavenski list* 19 (1936), 21.

[121] 21 April 1458, Iván Nagy / Albert Nyári, Magyar diplomacziai emlékek – Mátyás király korából (1458–1490), Vol. 1. Budapest 1875, 18; 1 May 1459, ibidem, 49–50. See also Đuro Tošić, Posljednja bosanska kraljica Mara (Jelena), *Zbornik za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine* 3 (2002), 29-60; Neven Isailović, Bračni planovi Kotromanića i državna politika Bosne polovinom XV veka, in: Momčilo Spremić (Ed.), Pad Srpske despotovine 1459. godine. Beograd 2011, 203–14.

[122] According to a charter issued in around 1330, Ban Stjepan II was married to the daughter of Bulgarian tsar Michael III (r. 1323–1330), Thallóczy, Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter, 14. In 1374 Ban Tvrtko married the daughter of Ivan Stratsimir, tsar of Vidin. (31 October 1375), Euzebius Fermendžin, Acta Bosnae potissimum ecclesiastica. Zagreb 1892, 40–42. See also: Vladimir Ćorović, Kralj Tvrtko I Kotromanić. Beograd, Zemun 1925, 36; Stanko Andrić, Mjesto svadbe bana Tvrtka I. i franjevački samostan 'Sveti Ilija', *Scrinia Slavonica* 4 (2004), 107–16.

[123] Jan Szlachtowski (Ed.), Joannis de Czarnków Chronicon Polonorum, in: Monumenta Poloniae Historica, Vol. 2. Lwów 1872, 619–756, 661. Cf. Jacob Caro, Geschichte Polens, Vol. 2. Gotha 1863, 366; Vjekoslav Klaić, Poviest Bosne do propasti kraljevstva. Zagreb 1882, 109.

[124] 18 July 1318, Tadija Smičiklas, Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, Vol. 8: 1301–1320. Zagreb 1910, 508.

from Styria,[125] Helfensten from Swabia,[126] Gara from Slavonia,[127] etc. Other similar potential connections were definitely in the process of discussion but never materialised. For instance, King Tvrtko I himself considered marrying into the Habsburg dynasty,[128] his son Tvrtko II attempted to obtain a bride from the house of Malatesta who were lords of Rimini,[129] while King Tomaš wanted his son Stjepan to marry one of the ladies from the family of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan.[130]

The reputation of the Kotromanići was also additionally increased through various marital alliances that they made with the local aristocracy in Bosnia. Female members of the dynasty were frequently married off to socially inferior vassals of the sovereign, thus interlinking the ruling house with families of different status. For instance, the sister of Ban Stjepan II was married to *župan* Nikola, a nobleman from the land of Hum.[131] In contrast, the granddaughter of King Dabiša was married to Voivode Juraj Radivojević, another lord from Hum.[132] The kings themselves also took wives from the local Bosnian nobility. King Ostoja's wife was a cousin of Knez Pavle Radinović,[133] and King Tomaš married Katarina, the daughter of Duke Stjepan Vukčić Kosača.[134] Many such relationships, unfortunately, remain undocumented and we do not know the origin of the majority of the Bosnian queen consorts.

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[125] Ignacij Voje, Odnos Celjskih grofova prema političkim prilikama u Bosni i Hercegovini u XV vijeku, in: Fikret Ibrahimpašić (Ed.), Radovi sa simpozijuma "Srednjovjekovna Bosna i evropska kultura". Zenica 1973, 53–67, 56.

[126] Nedim Rabić, "Maria… *von Bosnien:* bosanska vojvotkinja – njemačka grofica," in: Emir O. Filipović (Ed.), Žene u srednjovjekovnoj Bosni. Sarajevo 2015, 95–119.

[127] Pavao Anđelić, Bosanska kraljica Doroteja Gorjanska, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja n.s. Arheologija* 27–28 (1972–1973), 377–95.

[128] 30 August 1390, Šime Ljubić, Listine o odnošajih izmedju južnoga Slavenstva i Mletačke republike, Vol. 4: 1358–1403. Zagreb 1874, 285.

[129] 26 May 1422, Šime Ljubić, Listine o odnošajih izmedju južnoga Slavenstva i Mletačke republike, Vol. 8: 1420–1424. Zagreb 1886, 177; 4 October 1422, ibidem, 196.

[130] 20 July 1456, Vicentio Macuscev, Monumenta historica Slavorum Meridionalium vicinorumque populorum, Vol. 2. Belgradi 1882, 197–99.

[131] Marko Vego, Novi i revidirani natpisi iz Hercegovine, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja n.s. Arheologija* 15–16 (1961), 259–86, 268–70; Mihailo Dinić, Humsko-trebinjska vlastela. Beograd 1967, 4; Tihomir Glavaš, Nekropola knezova Nikolića u Vranjevu selu kod Neuma, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja n. s. Arheologija* 42–43 (1987–1988), 143–64, 147.

[132] 26 April 1395, Miklosich, Monumenta Serbica, 224–5.

[133] 24 August 1415, DSA, Lettere di Levante, Vol. 7, fol. 134r. Cf. Đuro Tošić, Pismo dubrovačkog poslanika Ivana Gundulića o smrti kneza Pavla Radenovića, in: Rajko Kuzmanović (Ed.), Zemlja Pavlovića. Srednji vijek i period turske vladavine. Banja Luka, Srpsko Sarajevo 2003, 357–66.

[134] Pejo Ćošković, Bosanska kraljevina u prijelomnim godinama 1443–1446. Banja Luka 1988, 104–5.

Regardless of how the original narrative was conceived or applied throughout the Middle Ages, whether it was based on real or imagined events, it is apparent that it helped establish the sense that Kotromanići were a dynasty equal in rank with other outstanding and celebrated families of medieval Europe, thus confirming their preeminent status and God-given right to rule over Bosnia.

Visual Devices in the Creation of the Kotromanić Dynastic Identity

The ancestor-focused discourse and the Kotromanić origin story were additionally complemented with a various array of images and visual representations, akin to modern corporate branding, that consolidated the dynastic and royal identity of the ruling kindred and emphasised their distinctiveness in relation to their subjects. In ceremonial, ritual and symbolic communication, heraldry, coins and seals played an immensely important role. With a recognisable armorial design that was handed down through generations, they were public statements of power and authority, providing family members with a simple visual mark that would indicate their participation in an extensive dynastic enterprise. Consequently, no opportunity was left unexploited to display the family coat-of-arms, especially when the same symbol also served as an emblem of the dynastic state.[135]

The earliest surviving example of the Kotromanić family arms is a simple *bend* which divides the heraldic escutcheon on the seals of Ban Stjepan II.[136] The same crest is also present on the seal of Katarina, the ban's daughter.[137] This rather plain design was then modified in 1377 after the coronation of King Tvrtko I when he introduced six fleurs-de-lys arranged in the free spaces on the heraldic shield. This coat-of-arms was preserved on the king's golden coin,[138] on the cloak made from brocade cloth which was found in his grave,[139] and on his seals.[140]

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[135] Emir O. Filipović, Heraldički problem vladarskog i državnog grba Bosne prema koncepciji Pave Anđelića, in: Marko Karamatić (Ed.), Zbornik o Pavlu Anđeliću. Sarajevo 2008, 33–55.

[136] Pavao Anđelić, Neka pitanja bosanske heraldike, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja n.s. Arheologija* 19 (1964), 157–72, 164.

[137] Ignacij Voje, Katarina Celjska-Kotromanićka in njen pečat, *Celjski zbornik* (1977–1981), 287–92. See also Emir O. Filipović, Pečat i nadgrobni natpis Marije, bosanske vojvotkinje i grofice od Helfensteina. Prilog heraldici Nemanjića i Kotromanića, *Godišnjak Centra za balkanološka ispitivanja ANUBiH* 44 (2015), 289–302, 294.

[138] Mihailo Dinić, Veliki bosanski zlatnik, *Istorijski časopis* 3 (1952), 41–54; idem, Oko velikog bosanskog zlatnika, *Istoriski glasnik* 3–4 (1955), 149–57.

[139] Pavao Anđelić, Krunidbena i grobna crkva bosanskih vladara u Milima (Arnautovićima) kod Visokog, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja n.s. Arheologija* 34 (1979), 183–247, 214–8.

[140] Idem, Srednjovjekovni pečati iz Bosne i Hercegovine. Sarajevo 1970, 19–25. See also Emir O. Filipović, "Creatio Regni" in the Great Seal of Bosnian King Tvrtko Kotromanić, in: Laura Whatley (Ed.), A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages. Leiden, Boston 2019, 264–76.

At the very beginning of the fifteenth century, King Ostoja introduced comprehensive heraldic changes, replacing the usual design with one which only had a royal crown in the shield.[141] His successors maintained this variant with certain adjustments, usually to personalise the crown with their royal monogram until the last king of Bosnia. On the great seal, the shield of the mounted warrior was also altered to reflect this heraldic reform, but curiously, the arms on the horse's caparison and the king's pennant remained the same. The fact that identical arms appeared once again on one variant of King Tomaš's silver coins[142] led researchers to believe, rightly so, that this was a family coat-of-arms which had never been fully abandoned. At the same time, the one with the crown represented the Kingdom and the individual who occupied the throne at any given time. As with the dynastic name, the Kotromanić heraldic emblem also expressed the coherence of this privileged and elite group, emphasised their family bonds, and defined their status and social position concerning others. Therefore, it represented a continual display of superiority and played a significant role in the building of dynastic identity.

Aside from frequently referring to ancestors and their legacy in written documents, one other distinctive feature of dynastic self-perception in Bosnia concerned the construction of sepulchral monuments which provided the living ruler with an opportunity to enhance his status by elevating the importance of his deceased predecessor. The first ruler to take concrete steps in this direction was Tvrtko I who supplemented his genealogical policies by presenting himself as the true and worthy successor of Ban Stjepan II. He did this by creating a cult around his uncle who was buried in the Franciscan church of St. Nicholas in Mili, near the nucleus of the Bosnian state in Visoki, in an edifice whose building he commissioned in accordance with his religious beliefs and conversion to Catholicism.[143] Namely, archaeological excavations proved that this church was also the burial place of King Tvrtko I who turned it into a veritable mausoleum for himself and his uncle.[144] The fact that this church was a potential coronation place for King Tvrtko, but also a location where the subsequent Bosnian kings were crowned, only increased its importance in the eyes of contemporaries.[145]

However, with the various internal changes in the structure of the state at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the rise of nobility and the increased external pressure on the Kingdom from the Hungarian as well as the Ottoman side, the church of St. Nicholas in Mili was abandoned

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[141] Anđelić, Srednjovjekovni pečati iz Bosne i Hercegovine, 36–38.

[142] Ivan Rengjeo, Novci bosanskih banova i kraljeva, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 55 (1943), 237–91, 286.

[143] Orbini, Il regno degli Slavi, 355.

[144] Anđelić, Krunidbena i grobna crkva bosanskih vladara u Milima (Arnautovićima) kod Visokog, 183–247.

[145] Dejan Zadro, Franjevačka crkva i samostan Sv. Nikole u srednjovjekovnim Milima (Arnautovići kod Visokog), *Prilozi* 33 (2004), 59–100. In 1446, Ragusans had information that King Tomaš and Queen Katarina were supposed to go to Mili for their royal coronation. See Dinić, Državni sabor srednjovekovne Bosne, 79.

as a designated burial place for the rulers of Bosnia.[146] Instead, a small gothic chapel within the fortification complex on Bobovac was converted into a royal mausoleum for the internment of King Ostoja and his successors.[147] In a symbolic sense, the fortified royal court on Bobovac was extremely important since it served as kind of capital of the Kingdom, a seat of the Kotromanić dynasty, and a location where the crown, throne and other insignia were kept. It made perfect sense to integrate the royal burial church into this complex in a move intended to additionally consolidate the symbols of dynastic identity and royal power. Three large graves have been unearthed within the ruins of this burial chapel, and all three were covered with massive tomb slabs made from Hungarian red limestone, polished to simulate the appearance of marble. The surviving broken fragments of these impressive monuments have been identified as belonging to Kings Ostoja, Tvrtko II and Tomaš,[148] and they entirely correspond to the gothic Central European models of funerary plaques from the beginning of the fifteenth century.[149] The monuments themselves displayed a life-size recumbent effigy of the deceased monarch carved in low relief and depicted in full military armour with complete royal insignia. The figure of the king was apparently surrounded by angels and heraldic signs, while his full regal title was inscribed in gothic minuscule running along the rim of the whole slab.

The walls of the royal burial chapel were also decorated with vivid frescoes. Unfortunately, no sense can be made from more than 1,000 excavated fragments, other than that the compositions depicted saints and biblical images.[150] It would be interesting to know whether these paintings portrayed any members of the Kotromanić dynasty as patrons and donors of these artistic achievements.

As an architectural and sculptural monument, the burial chapel validated the concept of hereditary authority and had its particular role in the construction of royal and dynastic identity. It was a bold political statement intended to increase the ruler's claim to legitimate power through emphasising his association with the accomplishments, heritage and memory of his forebears. Such an edifice, even though not entirely public, since it was situated behind walls and out of reach to their subjects, still influenced the overall perception of the dynasty and

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[146] Dubravko Lovrenović, Dinastički panegirizam bosanskih Kotromanića u ogledalu sepulkralne arhitekture, *Baština* 1 (2005), 281–314.

[147] Pavao Anđelić, Bobovac i Kraljeva Sutjeska – stolna mjesta bosanskih vladara u XIV i XV stoljeću. Sarajevo 1973, 66–70; Maja Lovrenović, Crkva svetog Mihovila u Bobovcu, in: Marko Karamatić (Ed.), Zbornik radova o fra Anđelu Zvizdoviću (1498–1998). Sarajevo, Fojnica 2000, 109–23.

[148] Anđelić, Bobovac i Kraljeva Sutjeska, 86-96. See also Mirsad Sijarić, Nadgrobne ploče tri bosanska kralja, *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu* 23 (2006), 229–56.

[149] Pál Engel / Pál Lövei / Livia Varga, Grabplatten von ungarischen Magnaten aus dem Zeitalter der Anjou-Könige und Sigismunds von Luxemburg, *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scietiarum Hungaricae* 30 (1984), 33–63. See also Livia Varga / Pál Lövei, Funerary Art in Medieval Hungary, *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 35 (1990–92), 115–67.

[150] Anđelić, Bobovac i Kraljeva Sutjeska, 75–77.

helped in the formation of its collective consciousness by linking a ruler with the history of his dynasty, with his ancestors and predecessors, and with the political mythology of kingship.

Concluding Remarks

Simply put, a dynasty is a succession of people from the same family, and this enduring social model behaves as a timeless entity looking both to the past and to the future. This means that dynastic identity is a dynamic, fluid concept which, as any form of group individuality or self-consciousness, has to be constructed and then constantly reaffirmed through various strategies of collective self-representation. The idea of the dynasty itself was malleable and was frequently manipulated in order to adapt to new contexts. Therefore, those who perceived themselves as members of a dynasty used various discourses to establish, consolidate, propagate or reiterate their dynastic identity.

This study considers such discourses as means of constructing the image of a ruling family on the example of the Kotromanići. They used several different methods to assert and present their kindred as a dynasty. Namely, the analysed sources show that members of the broader Kotromanić family undoubtedly shared a sense of collective identity and belonging to one elite community. They defined themselves as distinct in relation to others by cultivating a sense of solidarity, continuity, difference and affiliation with groups of similar social standing. This was done through the use of a collective "dynastic" name which was probably a retrospective invention since its late appearance in the documents of the fifteenth century contradicts the established narrative of the dynasty's antiquity. Kinship ties among various members of the Kotromanići served as the source of their dynastic awareness since power was understood as a common good that belonged to the entire kindred, and not just to one of its distinguished lines. This arrangement allowed the dynasty to survive and be perpetuated irrespective of the ruler's ability to produce a son who would succeed him, thus preventing the possibility of the dynasty ever becoming biologically extinct.

The Kotromanići based their legitimacy and right on ruling over Bosnia on genealogical consciousness, and they enforced their dynastic identity by consistently referring to their ancestors who ruled before them. After the coronation of King Tvrtko I, the Bosnian royal family was additionally bolstered with the sacred essence of the Serbian Nemanjić bloodline. Regularly invoking progenitors was supposed to portray the dynasty as an old and persistent body that holds out through time and various challenges. In that sense, of particular importance was the fundamental Kotromanić origin narrative which projected the dynasty's beginnings into a deep, almost mythical past. Rather than attempting to identify elements of historical truth in the story, this work builds upon the idea that the account of *Cotrumanno Gotto* should primarily be viewed through the prism of the way that the Kotromanići wanted to present themselves to their contemporaries. The "invention" of an illustrious predecessor and "creation" of a prestigious history was intended to justify and validate the unique position that the ruler and the dynasty held regarding their surroundings and subjects.

The dynastic awareness was also bolstered and affirmed through architectural monuments, imagery and art. Along with the dynastic name, the coat-of-arms was particularly significant in highlighting the continuity of the group for generations. At the same time, the royal mausoleums in Mili and Bobovac established a direct and visual relationship between the living members of the dynasty and their deceased ancestors from whom they derived their legitimacy. All of these elements evolved as a reaction to the intense social transformations in Bosnia at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century caused by the meteoric progress in economy and trade, by an almost unrestrained rise of nobility and by the subsequent increase of external political and military pressures on the Kingdom. They were means used to establish and maintain an undisputed and ultimately successful royal rule of the Kotromanić dynasty over Bosnia until their state was eventually dismantled and divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom in 1463.

In history, the rise of certain dynasties is analogous to the process of state formation, while the construction of dynastic identity and kingship are inextricably linked and can sometimes not be differentiated as separate developments. This means that medieval polities ruled by dynasties were essentially patrimonial dynastic states, and that pre-modern rulers are often perceived as bearers of national identity. However, as was argued by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, the dynastic identity of ruling families was of greater importance than their ethnic or national character.[151] In that sense the recent quest of some historians to define and label the Bosnian ruling family of Kotromanići as originally and exclusively a native, Serbian, Croatian or German dynasty becomes almost irrelevant, since to them, their identity was primarily dynastic, noble and royal.

ABSTRACT

This study analyses mechanisms used by the Bosnian ruling house of Kotromanić to construct their dynastic identity through discourses of legitimacy based on a tradition about their predecessors. The Kotromanići ruled Bosnia from at least the second half of the thirteenth century, perhaps even earlier, until the Ottoman conquest of the Bosnian Kingdom in 1463. During those two centuries of political domination, the supreme position of the dynasty was never seriously challenged. The various textual and visual contemporary sources presented here show that members of the broader kindred undoubtedly shared a sense of collective distinctiveness and belonging to one elite community. By describing how the identity of a dynasty was constructed and expressed in medieval Bosnia, this work will seek to fill a noticeable gap in the dynastic landscape of Europe, and to position the Kotromanići among the other European ruling dynasties of their time.

[151] DaCosta Kaufmann, Toward a Geography of Art, 144.

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